hypocrisy!

By Joe Clabby

To the Reader:

This is a historical fiction story about the POTUS Executive Order that curtailed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) rights. If you lean left, you'll likely like this story; if you lean right, you'll likely not like this story.

History is generally studied to understand how we arrived at our current state; why things are the way they are; and what patterns we may be repeating. We can learn from the successes of the past, as well as from past failures. Hopefully, history teaches us not to repeat our past failures...

Sincerely,

JC

This book, **inflection!**, covers the timeframe between:

Feb. 2025 - June, 2025

The second book in the series, **hypocrisy!**, covers the timeframe between:

June, 2025 - December, 2025

The third book in this series, **middleground!**, covers the timeframe between:

December 2025 – February 2026

The fourth book in this series, **playbook!**, soon to be released, covers the timeframe between:

January 2026 – March, 2026

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1600 Belts Road
Middletown, DE 19709

Ordering Information:

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available for corporations, associations, and other organizations that purchase in bulk.

Orders by U.S. trade bookstores and wholesalers. Please get in touch with joeclabby884@AOL.com

Printed in the United States of America

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication data

Clabby, Joseph E.

dam!/ Joe Clabby.

p. cm.

ISBN: ISBN: 9798291393284

1st Edition Revised

Contents

Prologue.....

Chapter 1: Sisters 3

Chapter 2: Me 5

Chapter 3: The Spat.....8

Chapter 4: The POTUS Game Plan..... 13

Chapter 5: A Setup?..... 16

Chapter 6: My Reporter Friend 18

Chapter 7: The "Pats Pizza" Offer 20

Chapter 8: The Interview..... 21

Chapter 9: PCPTV..... 24

Chapter 10: The State House Assignment 26

Chapter 11: Pizza at Pat's..... 29

Chapter 12: All is Good? 33

Chapter 13: Mlpita 36

Chapter 14: POS 383..... 38

Chapter 15: The Political Fallout..... 46

Chapter 16: Trans Sports?..... 49

Chapter 17: Using Trans-Sports as a Weapon 52

Chapter 18: A Little More Digging..... 53

Chapter 19: Brunch with the "Vixen Trickster"..... 56

Chapter 20: "Preposterous Reality!" 58

Chapter 21: The "Sources of the Hate" Discussion 61

Chapter 22: The Targeting of Fellow Citizens 64

Chapter 23: The Movie 66

Chapter 24: The Tipping Point..... 68

Chapter 25: Dad's Advice..... 70

Chapter 26: My Refresher Course in Non-Violence..... 74

Chapter 27: Movement Alignment 76

Chapter 28: Convincing Mary 79

Chapter 29: Modifying Our Lectures 84

Chapter 30: Our Counter-Blueprint..... 88

Chapter 31: Girls Night Out 92

Chapter 32: Recap 96

Chapter 33: What Are "Executive Orders?" 100

Chapter 34: Forcing Maine to Comply 108

Chapter 35: The Tariffs Lesson 111

Chapter 36: Comparing Presidencies 117

Chapter 37: Jackson Populism 118

Chapter 38: What Harding Didn't Do 120

Chapter 39: The Grant Assimilation 122

Chapter 40: The Attack of the Sycophant 125

Chapter 41: MAGA Man..... 129

Chapter 42: Delving Into the SSA Matter..... 137

Chapter 43: The Petulant Child..... 139

Chapter 44: “Compliance”..... 141

Chapter 45: “Intimacy”..... 144

Chapter 46: Trouble in River City 148

Chapter 47: Loyalist Legislators Appear..... 155

Chapter 48: Maine Fights Back 156

Chapter 49: The Slugfest..... 157

Chapter 50: The College of Maine Assignment..... 162

Chapter 51: The SIT Team Parallel..... 164

Chapter 52: Protest Activities..... 166

Chapter 53: My Email 169

Chapter 54: The Chancellor Meeting..... 173

Chapter 55: Lost Cause 180

Chapter 56: To the Board..... 182

Chapter 57: Above Board?..... 183

Chapter 58: “My Modest Proposal”..... 184

Chapter 59: Being Don Quixote..... 186

Chapter 60: Maine Wins!..... 188

Chapter 61: The Cat Gets Out of the Bag 189

Chapter 62: The Talk Show 190

Chapter 63: The Decision of the Board 198

Chapter 64: The Navy Quotes 200

Chapter 65: Determined and Committed 201

Chapter 66: The Final Straw 203

Chapter 67: Bye-Bye Miss American Pie 209

Chapter 68: Off to the Races! 211

Chapter 69: Cohabitation 213

Chapter 70: The Third Button..... 215

Chapter 71: A Date?..... 219

Chapter 72: The Pings..... 221

Chapter 73: "Old Jim"..... 222

Chapter 74: The Tarriff Discussion..... 225

Chapter 75: Now What?..... 227

Chapter 76: The Other Side of the Coin 228

Chapter 77: The "President's Birthday" Protests..... 229

Chapter 78: The Madness of King George 231

Chapter 79: Can I Get a Vaccination?..... 233

Chapter 80: Moving Forward 234

NOTICE: This book is a work of fiction. It should be noted that the College of Maine is fictitious. A Maine university, however, due to Federal pressure, did rename its "Office of Diversity and Inclusion" to the "Office for Community and Connections" (OCC) in March 2025. The POTUS DEI Executive Order described in this book is responsible for that change as it restricts the operation of federally funded DEI programs. Although the name and some public language have changed, that university emphasizes that the core mission of its former Office of Diversity and Inclusion remains unchanged. That university continues to focus on student support, education, and community building for diverse students.

Prologue

My office sits on the second floor of Trudeau Hall at the College of Maine in Bangor. The plaque on my door reads: Professor Olivia Thomason, Political Science. It does not read: "Enter here to find Professor Oliver Thomason, the transgender professor who thinks he's a woman."

Everyone on campus knows I'm transgender — faculty, students, friends. Most don't care. Most. There are always a few who treat my existence like a provocation, as if my gender identity is some kind of moral offense. Some churches and governments still label people like me as sinful, criminal, or corrupt.

What they fail to grasp is that being transgender — or gay, bisexual, queer, intersex, or anything else outside their narrow definition of "normal" — is not a choice. It's not a phase, a rebellion, or a lifestyle. It's simply who we are. I often describe gender identity as wiring: the internal circuitry that shapes how we understand ourselves. That wiring isn't something you can pray away, punish away, or "correct." It's part of the architecture of the brain.

Researchers call this field neuro-identity — the study of how the brain constructs the sense of self. It's real, it's measurable, and it's not something that can be unlearned. We are who we are.

And yet, for those who refuse to understand, that truth is enough to make us targets.

*

Why am I writing this book?

For more than fifty years, the United States offered me a measure of protection from people who would harm or harass me because I'm transgender. In 1972, Congress passed the Education Amendments of 1972, including Title IX — a law prohibiting sex-based discrimination in any educational program receiving federal funds.

Title IX became a shield. It meant that people couldn't legally mistreat me because of my gender identity. It meant that, at least on paper, the country recognized that people like me deserved the same rights and opportunities as anyone else.

But now, that shield has been taken away.

A political movement — built around the belief that only two genders exist and that identity is determined solely by "biological sex assigned at birth" — has succeeded in stripping away my protections. Under this Republican administration's interpretation, if you were born with a penis, you are a man; if you were born with a vagina, you are a woman. No exceptions. No nuance. No humanity.

Not long after taking office, the President of the United States (POTUS) issued an executive order dismantling DEI programs across federal agencies. Offices, training, hiring practices — gone. Federal contractors and grant recipients — pressured. Schools that refuse to comply — defunded.

And the rollback doesn't stop with gender. Race-based protections are being targeted as well. Affirmative action — once a tool to counteract generations of exclusion — is being erased in the name of "merit-based hiring," which translates into "chosen by people who look like me."

With Executive Order 14170, signed January 20, 2025, minority protections in employment have been gutted. If you're not white, you now face the same bullseye on your back that LGBTQIA+ people have carried for decades.

People like to say that policy is impersonal—that it's just paperwork and procedure. But Title IX was never just a policy. It was a promise. And now, under a deeply conservative, evangelical-driven agenda, that promise is being revoked.

So, I ask, honestly and without theatrics: What did people like me do to deserve this?

Chapter 1: Sisters

Mary Shelley — no, not that Mary Shelley — is my best friend. Why her parents chose to name her after the author of *Frankenstein* is a mystery even she can't solve. Still, the coincidence is too delicious to ignore. Every so often I'll stiffen my limbs, shuffle into her office with my arms outstretched, and give her my best lumbering-monster impression. She laughs every time. I call her "Frankie" on occasion, and she pretends to hate it.

Professionally, Mary is an associate professor in the History Department here at the College. She's sharp, funny, perceptive, and endlessly kind. She has that rare combination of warmth and intelligence that makes people feel seen without feeling judged.

*

There's a part of Mary's life almost no one knows about — because I promised her I'd keep it that way. Her husband was addicted to meth, and he was violent. He died of an overdose years ago. I don't mourn him. It's hard to imagine anyone raising a hand to Mary. She's gentle, thoughtful, and almost painfully sincere.

She married him at twenty-seven. By twenty-eight, the abuse had already begun. She endured nearly five years of it before he overdosed. Trauma leaves fingerprints, and Mary carries hers quietly. A sudden movement can still make her flinch. A raised voice can shut her down. But she's worked hard — therapy, time, distance — and she's rebuilt much of what he tried to break.

When she arrived at the College of Maine, she was already on the other side of the worst of it. She stands straighter now. She speaks up. She knows her worth. And I'm the only person on campus who knows the full story.

**

As for her appearance — calling Mary "pretty" feels almost insulting. She's striking. Long black hair, bright green eyes, a graceful frame, and those dimples that appear when she smiles. Those dimples could disarm an army.

Whenever she walks into a room, I'm reminded of that old Commodores song. She's a "*Brick House*" — confident, composed, and effortlessly magnetic. The song fits her spirit more than anything else: strong, self-possessed, and fully herself.

*

Mary's acceptance of me is one of the foundations of our friendship. She doesn't care that I'm a transgender woman; she never has. If anything, she treats it as just another detail about me — no more remarkable than my taste in wine or my tendency to overanalyze political speeches.

We're not romantically involved, and neither of us wants that. She's not interested in men right now, and I'm not a threat to her in any way. We're simply close — sister-close. We cook together, drink wine, watch the news, and dissect the world. We gossip about campus politics. We laugh. We hold each other up.

She's my confidante. My anchor. My sister

.

Chapter 2: Me

Regarding my appearance, I stand at six feet one inch tall and weigh 159 pounds. Those are large measurements for a woman. Since I was born male, I have a male's muscle mass, muscle tone, bone density, and overall body composition, so I'm kind of a big, muscular woman. I'm also very old — I'll be turning sixty in June. The big six-zero — oh joy, oh rapture...

*

Now for the fun part: transforming my body into a woman. How do I handle my beard and other hairy areas? I use a mix of hormone therapy and hair removal methods, along with regular shaving of my legs and armpits. Estrogen and anti-androgens slow down my facial hair growth but don't entirely remove my beard. I also receive laser hair removal treatments and use hair removal cream on those stubborn areas that just won't budge.

I have long, slender, attractively shaped legs. I constantly shave them; I hate stubble, I really do. My sleek, slim legs and small derriere are probably my most eye-catching features.

Also, using estrogen has increased my breast size. Due to estrogen injections, I developed a condition called *gynecomastia*, which caused my breasts to grow. I wear a padded 38B bra.

*

Regarding my wardrobe, I choose outfits that balance my proportions. Since I have broad shoulders, I prefer V-neck tops and A-line skirts to create a more hourglass shape. When I dress up, I wear high-waisted pants or wrap dresses because they make my waist look slimmer. If I wear pants, I usually go for flared styles because they divert attention from my large feet.

*

Over the years, I've figured out how to choose makeup colors that complement my skin tone; I know my colors, and sometimes, after a major makeover, I even look pretty.

Who would have thought there are so many shades of red hair dyes? There is copper, rose gold, strawberry, light auburn,

cinnamon, peach, wine, burgundy, dark cherry, dark auburn, mahogany, and ruby. I've picked ruby because my eyebrows are dark and blend well with the ruby color.

*

I almost forgot — I'm sure people wonder how I handle sex. I like men, but intimacy can be a bit tricky because of the *spoiler*: my male organ. Sometimes, I find a man who doesn't mind that, or a bi-guy, and we share intimacy in various ways, including some of the usual things heterosexual couples do. That means we snuggle, embrace, kiss, and find other ways to be close to each other.

I know — gross! But you should think of us this way: we are different from you in gender preference, but, in terms of intimacy, we have the same needs as you. We are all social animals; we need to communicate with our partners, show empathy, and give and receive affection. *We're human beings with human needs, and our emotional needs are no different from yours.*

*

As I've aged, I have found that the sex aspect of my life has diminished. My need for companionship far outweighs my need for sexual intimacy. I just need to feel close to someone. Sexually, although several of my transwomen friends prefer relations with other women, I do not. All I want right now is a close female relationship, friendship, and companionship. And with Mary, I have that.

*

One last thing – where do I stand politically?

I describe myself as a "*Fiscal Republican*." Like most other Republicans, I want limited government interference, fewer regulations — I don't like the government to interfere excessively in the economy or my personal life.

I also want low taxes, a strong national defense, law and order, and a "*Free Market"* economy. By Free Market economy, I believe that the government should not pick "winners" and "losers" in given industries – just let the market dictate that for itself.

However, here's my strongest conviction: *I believe the government should be fiscally responsible*. I see raising the national debt as a threat to our long-term economic stability and a burden that future generations will have to bear as they pay interest on that debt. I despise floating our economy on borrowed money.

Chapter 3: The Spat

In the late afternoon of February 21st, 2025, just as I returned from teaching a class on *Constitutional Law*, Mary burst into my office.

"*Did you see it?*" she asked, with an excited, anxious, imploring look on her face. "*I just sent you the link! You've got to see what POTUS just did!*"

Sure enough, the link was in my email:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5z4hfhwEVw.

I immediately clicked on it and watched an unexpected drama unfold. It took place in Washington, D.C., at the White House, where a nonpartisan group of U.S. governors had gathered with the President for a *Governor's Working Session*. The President just wanted to have a "little chat" with the Republican and Democratic state governors. He wanted to "*provide guidance*" and get them in synch with his *Project 2025* playbook.

During this working session, POTUS went out of his way to target the Governor of Maine for not complying with one of his many Executive Orders. He literally called her out: "*Is Maine here, the governor of Maine*?"

POTUS and his team then orchestrated a small "setup" meant to intimidate Maine into obeying his executive order to eliminate DEI rights.

He also aimed for this incident to serve as a warning to other governors that if their states did not follow the President's *Executive Orders*, the federal government would punish them by withholding promised funds.

*

The following is a transcript of this drama:

POTUS: Two weeks ago, I signed an executive order banning men from playing in women's sports. Many Democrats are fighting me on that. I hope you continue because you'll never win another race. And it's just crazy, if you look at what happened with

the boxing, if you look at what happened with the weightlifting numbers, where a record that hadn't been broken for 19 years got shattered.

It is unclear what weightlifting incident POTUS was referring to. It appears to be a figment of his imagination. He constantly retells this story, fostering suspicion and divisiveness, as he attempts to justify his DEI position... Two transgender people did compete in those Olympics. Neither competed in weightlifting...

POTUS (cont'd): "You know, they put up an eighth of an ounce here, an eighth of an ounce there, and it's 218 pounds or whatever, a lot. And it hadn't been broken in 19 years. And then a guy walks up who transitioned, he transitioned, and he knocked out that record by about 100 pounds. That would be a record, not going to be broken again in a long — so we put a ban on it. And to protect women.

He then moved on to an alleged transwoman competition in some obscure boxing match.

POTUS: I mean, the women, if you watch the Olympics, you had two transitioned people that were fighting in the women's boxing, they have a women's boxing category. If you saw that it was brutal what happened to the — the Italian woman was a really good boxer. After one punch, she said no, no, no more, no more.

There were no transwomen who participated in Olympic Boxing. Yet, POTUS constantly retells this story to reinforce his anti-trans position.

POTUS: I've never been hit — it was a left, it was not even a left jab. She got hit so hard. She said I can't do it. They forced her to go out. No, go out, go out again. You'll do. She goes out again, hits — gets hit again. No, no, that's it. She didn't want to die. And it's crazy, but. Uh, the NCAA has complied immediately, by the way.

Why has he now shifted to the NCAA. I thought we were talking about the Olympics. Regardless, the NCAA does not sponsor boxing as a championship sport. Also, there is no record of transwomen fighting straight women in boxing at the college level — none whatsoever! But, nonetheless, this message resonates

with transgender bigots. "How unfair," they think. "Men fighting women. Those trans people are abusing their protection rights..."

At this point, POTUS shifted the discussion, specifically targeting Maine with his perspective on trans-sports.

POTUS: **That's good. But I understand, is Maine here, the governor of Maine?**

Janet Mills (the Governor of Maine): I'm here. Yeah, I'm here.

POTUS: Are you not going to comply with it?

Janet Mills: ***I'm complying with state and federal laws.***

POTUS: Well, *I'm* (sudden pause), *we* are the federal law.

The nerve! "He IS the law?" Really? Everyone knows that Presidents don't make laws—Congress does! I teach this stuff, so I ought to know! Presidents can issue all of the Executive Orders they want, but those orders aren't law. Congress, comprised of the House of Representatives and the Senate, is responsible for drafting, debating, and passing bills, as well as creating laws.

Back to the action...

Janet Mills: Well —

POTUS interrupts: Well, you better do it. You better do it because you're not going to get any federal funding at all if you don't. And by the way, your population, even though it's somewhat liberal, although I did very well there, your population doesn't want men playing in women's sports. So, you better — you better comply because otherwise you're not getting any, any federal funding...

*

I paused the video. *"A threat over non-compliance? Hardball?"* I said, and Mary nodded. *"He's threatening to cut Maine off from federal funding?*

Mary affirmed my interpretation, then added, "*It gets worse...*"

*

I hit the play icon, and, as Mary had promised, there was more "fun" to be had. Or should I say more LGBTQ+-phobia bashing?

This was the moment that made me glowingly proud to be a Mainer. Janet's following five-word sentence was a watershed moment for the state of Maine! I consider it to be an "inflection point" in Maine history.

Janet Mills: We'll see you in court...

The gauntlet had been thrown down! Janet had probably thought:

I'm not going to take any more of your supercilious bullshit. Janet was a lawyer before becoming governor. She knew that POTUS had just taken a shot at the Title IX policy that Maine was bound to comply with by law. And she steadfastly refused to be bullied.

I smiled at the idiotic comedy I was witnessing. It reminded me of an old-time Cocoa Puffs cereal commercial, where Sonny the Cuckoo Bird and his grandfather, Gramps, were the stars. In the commercial, Sonny gets into trouble, and Gramps, dressed as a judge, dramatically declares, "See you in court, Sonny!" – and all sorts of zany activity ensues. How appropriate, I thought, knowing that all kinds of whacko activity was about to ensue between the Federal Government and the State of Maine..

I wish Janet had said: "*See you in court, Sonny!*" That would have been hilarious.

It took a moment, but Janet's refusal to be bullied finally sank into the POTUS's mind because he kept rambling, then suddenly paused, as if he lost focus. POTUS seemed momentarily confused, as if he didn't quite believe what he had just heard. His surprise revealed that he was clearly not accustomed to people standing up to him.

POTUS: Every state (PAUSE) — good, I'll see you in court. I look forward to that. That should be a real easy one.

Would it be an "easy" one? I wondered. *Would it be easy to win a case against the state of Maine for upholding existing Title IX protections? Title IX is the law; to comply with the POTUS Executive Order would require Maine to break the law.*

But nooooo, POTUS wasn't done. It was time for his usual cheap shot. Rude, just plain unnecessary. But that's the way he is.

POTUS: And enjoy your life after governor, because I don't think you'll be in elected politics.

What an arse. Does he not know that our Governor is barred from seeking reelection in 2026 due to term limits? Does he even know what term limits are?

But POTUS was not finished. He continued to drone on.

POTUS: Every state has a responsibility to comply with Title IX, to have an obligation, a legal obligation. And we'll be enforcing aggressively. And we're going to be protecting our citizens...

Yes, POTUS, every state has a responsibility to comply with Title IX — that's what Janet Mills just is doing! And you threatened her with the freezing of federal funds for doing so? You're angry at her because she won't break the law? Are you really that naïve about Constitutional Law? Really?

The POTUS/Governor's meeting continued, with the POTUS moving in other policy directions. Mercifully, the video ended at that point.

Chapter 4: The POTUS Game Plan

"Wow," I murmured, taking off my glasses and rubbing my temple. "Well... it's begun. With that challenge to Janet, the other shoe has officially dropped."

Mary didn't need me to explain. We both knew exactly what we were watching unfold: the *Heritage Foundation's Project 2025* blueprint in motion.

For more than thirty years, I've followed the Heritage Foundation — a conservative think tank in Washington, D.C. that champions free enterprise, limited government, individual liberty, and a strong national defense. On paper, those principles sound straightforward enough. But their definition of "traditional American values" has always troubled me. Their version is steeped in a particular religious worldview, one rooted in Christian doctrine. And I've always wondered: what about the millions of Americans who aren't Christian? Should they be governed by someone else's theology? Should public policy be shaped by a single religious interpretation?

The Heritage Foundation isn't new. It has shaped Republican policy for decades. The first time I saw its influence up close was during the Reagan administration. Reagan relied heavily on the Foundation's manifesto, *Mandate for Leadership*, using nearly two-thirds of its recommendations. History, it seems, is repeating itself. The current administration is following the 2025 edition "religiously."

If you want to understand the conservative roadmap for the future, you don't need to guess. It's all laid out in that manifesto — *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise,* subtitled *Project 2025*. It's in its ninth edition and available as a free PDF. The Heritage Foundation practically hands it to the public. The playbook is hiding in plain sight.

And if you want a clear, accessible explanation of what Project 2025 aims to do — and how citizens might push back — Emily Carter Lee's *Project 2025: A Citizen's Guide to Saving American Democracy* is an excellent companion. It breaks down the goals, strategies, and implications in a way that anyone can understand.

*

Mary and I bought printed copies of the ninth edition when it was released in April 2023. Sometimes it's easier to flip through a physical book than to hunt for citations on a screen. We studied it closely, and we were stunned by how faithfully the administration was following it.

"I don't know why more Americans didn't read this before voting," Mary said at the time. "It was right there."

But they didn't. And now we have a President who is treating the manifesto like scripture.

A closer look at the blueprint reveals a plan to consolidate executive power, restructure federal agencies, and implement a sweeping set of far-right policy goals. It's a roadmap for reshaping the federal government from the inside out. Mary and I both found it chilling, which is why we prayed — literally — that the election would go differently.

But it didn't.

*

Our analysis broke the Project 2025 agenda into seven major thrusts:

- Restructure the federal government
- Shift control of education back to the states
- Undertake mass deportations
- Eliminate DEI and gender-related protections

- Return to fossil fuels and disregard climate agreements
- Restrict voting rights
- Control information by limiting federal communication with social media platforms

The proposals include reorganizing the Justice Department, eliminating the Department of Education, and removing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion protections across federal agencies. A new executive order even restricts federal agencies from collaborating with social media platforms, effectively centralizing control of government messaging in the hands of a few high-level officials.

So, when the President publicly confronted Governor Mills, Mary and I recognized the pattern immediately. It aligned perfectly with the manifesto's call to dismantle DEI protections. And according to the playbook, the next target would be the immigrant population.

Chapter 5: A Setup?

"Well, what do you think?" Mary asked.

"I think it was a setup from the start," I said. "He walked into that meeting planning to go after Janet for refusing to comply with his executive order."

Mary nodded sharply. "He's issued more than a hundred and twenty executive orders to push this Project 2025 agenda. This one was absolutely premeditated. He wanted to bully her — make an example out of her. But it backfired. She didn't fold. She went right back at him. Good for her."

Mary especially relished the moment when he said, "I'm betting it'll be an easy one." He clearly thought the federal government could pounce on Maine and steamroll us. But nothing about this fight will be easy for him.

"I'm certain Maine will prevail," she said. "He's demanding that our state violate a federal law Congress passed decades ago."

As a historian, Mary knew the constitutional terrain well. The Supremacy Clause in Article VI makes federal law the ultimate authority. She had already concluded that the President had overstepped his constitutional limits; she simply wanted to hear my take.

I agreed. "We're talking about the Education Amendments Act of 1972. Title IX prohibits sex-based discrimination in any educational program receiving federal funds. This administration wants to discriminate."

I paused, counting on my fingers. "Since 1972, we've had six Republican presidents. Not one of them tried to dismantle LGBTQ+ protections or affirmative action. But this administration has veered far-right, ultra-conservative. Their attack on DEI is deliberate."

Mary leaned back, her expression tightening. "What we're witnessing, Olivia, is a massive shift in American governance. They're targeting small minority groups and stripping away protections under the guise of reducing government spending. But the real message is simpler and uglier: You're minorities. You don't matter."

Her words hit hard because they were true. The rhetoric coming from the far right echoed that sentiment unmistakably.

I added, "And it's not surprising. This administration has aligned itself with groups known for hostility toward minorities. Some extremist groups have even appeared at political events connected to the movement. The hostility isn't subtle."

*

Later, reporters pressed Governor Mills for her response to the President's outburst. She didn't hesitate:

> "*I have spent my career – as a District Attorney, as Attorney General, and now as Governor – standing up for the rule of law in Maine and America. To me, that is fundamentally what is at stake here: the rule of law in our country. No President – Republican or Democrat – can withhold federal funding authorized and appropriated by Congress and paid for by Maine taxpayers in an attempt to coerce someone into compliance with his will. It is a violation of our Constitution and of our laws, which I took an oath to uphold.*"

She added that Maine was the first target of this heavy-handed political maneuvering — and likely not the last.

Chapter 6: My Reporter Friend

PCPTV is part of the new wave of news delivery — it's known as a "*digital-first*" network and offers à la carte video news options. You choose the news streams you want, and they play back in the order you select. You don't have to listen to stories you're not interested in, and there are far fewer commercials. It's the new way to watch news, and I like it.

*

The day after the Mills/POTUS spat, on a Saturday morning, I got a phone call from my friend, Alex Monroe, a reporter at PCPTV.

"Hey, Professor," Alex began. "Thanks for your help last time with our story on 1st Amendment rights. I was wondering, given this Mills/POTUS situation, if you'd be willing to do a news segment on the legal aspects of their disagreement?"

"Of course I would, Alex! I've got plenty to say on this matter. So, when would you like to do it?" I asked.

"How about *now*?"

"Fine with me. Meet me at my office in about half an hour."

"Will do."

*

Now, a little background on Alex. Despite our significant age difference — Alex will soon be forty-two and I'm turning sixty — we cherish each other's company, and the generational gap leads to some interesting conversations. As for how often we see each other, we can go long periods without meeting, but when we finally do, it's like no time has passed.

The aspect I appreciate most about Alex's reporting is that he strives to present the news impartially, which I believe is somewhat of a lost art. He's well organized, his stories flow logically, and he offers solid analysis. He's definitely a seasoned professional.

As for his assignments, Alex is a very flexible character: he loves his job, but it takes him all over the place. One day he'll be

covering the crime beat; the next he'll get the lost dog or cat human interest story; the next he'll get a story on the plight of the lobstermen; and so on. He doesn't really specialize; he's a generalist. In this case, he was the station's political reporter.

In terms of appearance, Alex is just under six feet tall and maintains a good physique. I'd estimate he weighs around 165 to 175 pounds. He has light brown hair and blue eyes, and he dresses very well. He's outgoing; his conversations, when he's not joking or messing around, are engaging.

Alex is very much like me. He's got a quick wit; he's often sarcastic, as am I, and he's kinda heady — like he's a bit of an intellectual. He, too, could have been a professor in another life.

Chapter 7: The "Pats Pizza" Offer

Alex and the news team videographers showed up at my office at around 10:30 on Saturday morning.

"Long time no see!" Alex greeted me, extending his hand and shaking mine vigorously. "How've you been?"

"I've been well, Alex. Great to see you again, too!"

"Far too long, Professor. We should catch up someday. I'd love to hear what you're working on and how things are going here at the College. "

Alex paused for a moment and then proposed a get-together. "Heh, I'm free late this afternoon – if you're not too busy, would you like to get together at *Pat's Pizza* for a bite and a beer. Or maybe two, or maybe three beers?"

Alex knew I'd jump at that offer. He knows that I'm am not embarrassed, and he's not the slightest bit embarrassed when we go out together. In fact, most people think I'm his mother. Honestly, at this age, I sometimes do look like an old matron. But when we go out together, we always have a good time and engaging conversations about politics, Maine news, and other topics. We also talk about our "situations" in life — including our jobs, goals, and romantic relationships. Strangely, despite our mutual natural good looks, we're each facing difficulties in love. Odd, isn't it?

*

I happily accepted Alex's invitation. "I'm wide open later this afternoon, and I'd love to. I'd like to find out what you've been up to, and how life is treating you," I smiled. He knew that what I was really saying was "*How's your love life*?" I hoped he had finally been able to rebuild after all these years.

"Fine then," Alex said, "Today at four o'clock at Pat's. Hopefully there's a good basketball game on," he said, pleased, as I was, that we were finally going to get together.

After exchanging pleasantries and discussing our plan to meet at Pat's, it was time to conduct the interview.

Chapter 8: The Interview

The thing about video interviews is that they're never really about the interview. They're about the soundbite — that one crisp, quotable line that props up the reporter's story. If they're lucky, they get a few. If they're really lucky, they get one that rattles a few cages.

In my interview with Alex, I managed to hand him all three.

*

"Professor," he began, settling into his practiced on-camera seriousness, "You teach constitutional law at the College. What's your take on the spat between Governor Mills and the President yesterday?"

Soundbites. Always soundbites. I'd rehearsed something with a little punch.

"You've gotta hand it to the President — he knows exactly where the pressure point is. He's using an incongruity, a misinterpretation of Title IX, to challenge protections for the entire LGBTQ+ community."

As soon as the words left my mouth, I knew it was too dense. Too academic. Maine audiences weren't going to follow that thread, and the editors would cut it before lunch. I needed something cleaner, something that wouldn't send viewers scrambling for Google.

*

I tried again.

"My view, Alex, is that the President is trying to force state governments to comply with one of his executive orders. Governor Mills pushed back, citing existing federal and state laws. Those laws directly conflict with his directive. Until those laws are reaffirmed or rescinded, she's obligated to follow them."

Much better. Digestible. Airtime-worthy.

“So, when she said, ‘I’ll see you in court,’” Alex continued, “she was really saying, ‘Are you asking me to ignore a law and follow your command?’”

“Precisely.”

Alex nodded, pleased. Then came the next fishing expedition.

“And what do you think of this situation?”

Open-ended. Classic soundbite bait.

“The way I see it,” I said, “this is yet another attempt by the federal government to target the LGBTQ+ community. People who don’t fit the so-called norm are being marginalized. It reminds me of the assimilation policies under the Ulysses S. Grant administration — ‘Let’s force them all to be like us, the normal white people who fit into a homogeneous society.’”

Alex blinked. Then he paused the interview.

“Professor, ninety percent of our audience won’t know what you’re talking about. Can you give me something else to work with?”

I took a breath. He wanted a prediction — something clean, confident, and forward-looking. If I were writing his story, I’d want the same.

“How is this going to turn out?” I said, reframing it for him. “The federal government will block Maine’s funds. We’ll sue. They’ll realize they can’t force compliance — not under current law — and the whole thing will be resolved before it ever reaches a courtroom.”

That did it. His eyes lit up. He had his narrative arc: the conflict, the legal framing, the tidy forecast. Add a few establishing lines, splice in a counterpoint from someone else, and he had his package.

Alex thanked me, gave me his usual “Always a pleasure,” and he and his crew packed up.

“See you this afternoon,” he called as he left my office.

“See you at Pats,” I replied.

*

I remember thinking, Well, that was harmless.

I also remember thinking, And utterly forgettable.

And then the real question crept in: *Was I doing enough? Was I speaking loudly enough about the injustice being done to the so-called "gender extremists" among us?* And if I wasn't, what platform should I be using?

I figured I'd ask Alex over pizza later. He always had opinions about what made a message land.

Chapter 9: PCPTV

I've known the Professor for at least five years — we met when I was a reporter at our local Bangor newspaper. About two years ago, I switched to *Pine Coast Public Television* (PCPTV) because I believe the future of news isn't the written word; it's digital.

PCPTV differs from traditional broadcast news providers in that we prioritize online audio and video news delivery over print and broadcast channels. This means that instead of focusing on newspapers, broadcast or cable TV, or radio as primary distribution methods, digital-first outlets use websites, mobile apps, social media, podcasts, and video streaming as our main news delivery tools. Don't look now, but this is the direction broadcast news is heading. It's an evolutionary step toward the next generation of how people will receive their news.

In Maine, due to increased mobile phone use and expanded internet access across the state, PCPTV has become a "must-use" site for our viewers. At The College of Maine, among the student community, digital-first is increasingly the preferred way to get local, state, and national news and weather, instead of watching an evening news show with a predetermined set of stories covering topics the viewer may or may not be interested in at a scheduled, fixed time, in a fixed format, with broadcasts heavily laden with commercials.

Think of digital-first in this way: some people want only local news, such as nearby events, recaps of past events, weather updates, information about fires and disasters, local government news, and stories of local interest. Others may want only state news, only national news, or a mix of both. Imagine being able to pick just the news you want, easily line up your streams, and watch only the news in the order and duration you prefer.

Don't care about local school issues? – Skip that stream. Don't like special interest stories? – Skip that stream. Do like weather reports – choose that stream. And so on. No wonder the station's motto is "*News the Way <u>You</u> Want It.*"

*

The parent company of PCPTV is privately funded, *Epoch Nexus Media Group*. Epoch Nexus has launched and staffed thirty-seven digital-first online stations across thirty states to date. Some states, such as California, have two or three Epoch Nexus stations due to their city sizes and geographic distribution. For example, California has Epoch Nexus news outlets in Sacramento, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Some states have dense news reporting teams, with Washington, D.C., funding nine reporters, and New York City funding six.

Setting up shop in Maine, with a population of only 1.41 million, may seem like an unusual choice, but two of the four owners hail from Maine; they summer here in Bar Harbor, and they wanted their own Maine station. Presto-chango, voilà – Maine had its digital-first station!

*

Ted Asner is my general manager at PCPTV. He supervises operations and sets the station's strategic direction. Warren P. Lebold, the programming director, is responsible for selecting and scheduling content clips. He functions as the station's managing editor. The key production manager, the person who coordinates filming and editing, is Nate Borkowski. He leads the film crews, edits their footage, and supplies graphics. Additionally, our office, located in Bangor because of its central position in the state, has another reporter who conducts interviews and writes stories. We are helped by several "stringers" who gather news and shoot videos on a pay-per-piece basis.

Local and state stories are broadcast across the entire Epoch Nexus Media Group network of stations. For example, suppose a PCPTV reporter here interviews the Maine Attorney General about the spat between POTUS and Mills. In that case, that interview can be used by other Epoch Nexus outlets nationwide in their news coverage. As we add more sites in different states, our local reports are shared with them and are accessible across our expanding network.

Chapter 10: The State House Assignment

Before meeting the Professor at Pats, I submitted our interview to my boss, Warren, who was thrilled at how quickly I had turned around my Professor story. He had already come up with some new story ideas, so he laid them on me.

"We're going to need you to head on over to the statehouse on Monday to grab some interviews with the Governor, possibly the AG, and maybe a few legislators," Warren told me.

"I'd be thrilled to do that," I complied. "I take it you want me to cover this POTUS/Mills thing?"

"Righteeoo," Warren answered. "We want this to look like a *David and Goliath* story, with Governor Mills being 'David' and POTUS being the big, bad, ugly, orange-haired 'Goliath.' The reporters in Washington will get us the Goliath side of the story – and with both sides covered, we should be able to put together an ongoing news stream of 'biblical' proportions" on this Mills/POTUS situation."

I caught the biblical reference pun, and thought: *His puns are usually terrible, like "dad jokes." But this one wasn't that bad.*

I thought about the assignment and offered my opinion. "To me, the big question on the table regarding this fray is: '*Is the federal government allowed to withhold funds from states that fail to comply with Executive Orders*?"

Warren used his AI assistant, and after a few moments, obtained that answer. "My AI program says: 'The answer is 'yes!' This is allowed under the "*Spending Clause*" of the U.S. Constitution, which allows *Congress* to attach conditions to federal funding. And Congress has indeed attached such conditions to funding the Title IX law."

"Yeah, but," I paused, "I think these guys are going to continue to try and coerce our Governor into submission; into breaking the law."

"POTUS has already tried to coerce her," Lebold replied. "Remember when he said: '*Well, you better do it. You better do*

it because you're not going to get any federal funding at all if you don't.' To me, that's coercion."

"So, this should be an interesting battle," I posited. "POTUS said: 'This is going to be an easy one,' but I have the feeling it won't be. I think we're going to have a lot of follow-on stories on this little event."

"Yeah," Warren speculated. "I'm betting he'll weaponize various government departments to try and force compliance across the board on numerous fronts like education, voting rights, immigration, and so on. We're going to have scads of conflicts to cover with this President!"

"Aren't you worried that he'll target our organization?" I asked. "He's already starting to take aim at the press. If we side with Governor Mills on this one, he may come after us?"

"Hell no," Lebold responded. "He's targeting *National Public Radio* because they receive federal funding, and he dislikes how they cover him and his administration. If they leaned far right in his favor, their funding wouldn't be questioned—hell, it might even have doubled if they had sung from his hymnal from the start. So much for freedom of the press..."

I chuckled at his second liturgical reference of the day. *What is with him today?*

Lebold continued: "And his *'Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship*,' Executive Order is a façade. He's claiming that the Biden administration pressured social media companies to suppress their stories under the guise of combating misinformation. And he, and his administration, of course, would never stoop so low."

"Yeah, right," I concurred.

"But what he's really doing is opening the door for misinformation. Federal agencies will now be less cooperative with us independents, and that'll make fact-checking much more difficult. Those news organizations that do play ball with the new administration will get all the one-sided, far-right messages that they could ever desire."

"We're in for an interesting next four years," I reflected. "Meanwhile, I'll head down to Augusta on Monday morning to see if I can get a meeting with Governor Mills or her AG, then take it from there."

Chapter 11: Pizza at Pat's

The rest of the day flew by, and before I knew it, I was at the original *Pat's Pizza* in Orono waiting for Alex. It's just over a mile from the main campus, and walking distance from my house.

For those unfamiliar with Pat's, it's a Maine institution. It dates back to the Depression Era, having opened in Orono in 1931. It was later purchased by Carl D. "Pat" Farnsworth, who had worked there as a high schooler when it was an ice cream shop. There are now fifteen locations spread across the state of Maine.

Over time, the menu expanded beyond ice cream, and Pat's now offers classic American fare, including hot dogs, fries, burgers, and, of course, its namesake pizza. The pizza has a thin crust, just how I like it, and the sauce is stellar – it has an Italian seasoning flavor with hints of oregano, basil, rosemary, and thyme. And they don't skimp on the toppings – especially the cheese. And here's a rarity: they even have anchovies! I love anchovies and pepperoni on my pizza. Yeah, I know, it stinks up the place, but I still love 'em.

How popular is Pat's in Maine? The Orono Pat's sells about a quarter of a million pizzas a year...

*

I arrived at Pat's about five minutes before four and didn't want to sit alone at the bar — it's kind of awkward for us trans women. So I waited outside for Alex to show up. Alex arrived right at four, and then we headed to the bar together. As we took our seats, I received the "look" from a few waitresses, and I could tell what they were thinking: "How cute, a mother and her son... Or maybe they were thinking 'How can a hag like that have such a drop-dead handsome son?'"

I let it go; I'm used to it when Alex and I go out.

*

"So, Alex, what have you been up to?" I started. The bartender, however, interrupted to take our order. We started with beers and wings.

"Busy, busy, busy," Alex claimed. "Lots of political news lately, which I love. Some special interest stories; some feel-good stories – as usual, I'm all over the place." He paused, "How about you?"

"Me?" I started. "I'm all wrapped up in this diversity, equity, and inclusion stuff. The government is trying to deny us '*aberrants'* our civil rights, so I'm trying to figure out how to challenge the government's position." Alex caught my drift — I was mulling over the idea of protesting the government's DEI policies.

"You mean *protest*?" Alex asked, a little surprised that I, an old professor, was considering joining a protest movement.

"Not exactly," I answered defensively, feigning indignation. Alex cracked up. "I can't see myself carrying a sign and marching in a protest parade. But, in the back of my mind, I'm playing with some ideas regarding protesting through social media."

Alex looked intrigued, so I expounded a bit on my thoughts.

"Like getting current and past students involved in a coalition against POTUS's anti-LGBTQ+ initiatives. Or creating a united block of educational institutions to fight these government injustices. Or, finding a way to align with other LGBTQ+ protest efforts about to happen nationwide."

Alex smiled as he patted me on the back, and he good-naturedly teased me. "Professor, I'm proud of you. You still have some fight left in you at the tender young age of – what are you – a hundred?"

"Not quite, but getting there," I answered.

We engaged in a lengthy discussion about my protest options. Alex had some good ideas, and he had some good contacts at various state government offices who might be willing to help me formulate my plan. At least, he promised, they would be sympathetic to my cause. We finally shifted the conversation to him and his love life between shots in overtime of the basketball game.

*

Alex's work schedule keeps him plenty occupied. I do not doubt that he could work eighty hours a week building news stories if he could only find videographers who could accompany him on some of his adventures. I saw my opportunity to segue to the status of his love life, so I asked: "How about finding a female videographer who can accompany you?"

Alex chuckled. "That was a kind of rocky segue, Professor." I forgot, a big part of his job is writing stories with multiple segways in the flow. He caught me.

"Well?" I asked.

"Well, you see, it's like this," he lowered his voice. When it comes to his love life, Alex is a very private person; he doesn't want to be overheard. "I've been through a couple of relationships over the past few years, and each of them crashed-and-burned. So now, I'm avoiding romantic endeavors."

Abstinence? I was a little surprised by that. Young, handsome, famous – you'd think he'd be inundated with dating offers. "So why is this?" I asked. I suspected that he had never recovered from the sudden loss of his wife, so he was sabotaging his relationships when they got too personal. Sure enough...

"Well, I had this one girl whom I thought I was falling in love with, but the closer we got, the more demanding and controlling she got. She even complained about the amount of time I was spending at work. Then she decided I wasn't paying enough attention to her, and that was that."

*

I know Alex, and one of the secret weapons he uses to sabotage his relationships is "work." He can spend his time traveling and working long hours, essentially hiding from his girlfriends, and that, for some obscure reason, bothers them. Eventually, they blow him off. The two women he had dated over the past year sounded like the same old story: they couldn't crack his shell, so they went off on their own merry way to find other, more attentive men.

*

Alex steered the conversation in a different direction, toward "*Mlpita*," his dog. Usually, Alex tells me how energetic his dog is, what a bothersome yapper the mutt is, and what kind of trouble the little villain has gotten into lately. Alex referred to the two-year-old mutt as a "demanding little bastard," but deep down, I know he loves that mutt. Alex had a few funny stories about the dog's latest mischievous escapades, but little had changed: the dog was still driving him nuts.

*

By the end of our get-together, we had each consumed three beers, along with two pizzas and two orders of buffalo wings. Duke lost, but some other team followed that game, so between our conversation, meals, and sports, we had a delightful time.

We eventually made our goodbyes, promising to get together on a more regular basis, which may or may not happen. Still, it was fun.

*

When I returned home, I kept thinking how much Alex reminded me of myself. Personable, witty, sarcastic, passionate about work, and a little bit crazy. And like me, no love life...

Chapter 12: All is Good?

I thought that get-together at *Pat's Pizza* with Olivia was a blast, a really good time. After leaving *Pat's*, I made my way home, where Mlpita eagerly awaited my arrival.

I may have acted bemused by Olivia's claim that she planned to join the nationwide protests against the current administration, but, in reality, I took her intention deadly seriously. There's trouble brewing for those who protest against the U.S. federal government; I can just feel it. This administration claims it's all about law and order, but what it is really doing is positioning to use military force to quell rioters – a "first step" in implementing authoritarian dictatorships.

I fear for my friend Olivia. Protests, even peaceful protests, will eventually become unsafe, and retribution for those who participate may also be on the horizon.

*

I grew up in Brunswick, Maine, the home of Bowdoin College. It's a quiet town, with two excellent Indian restaurants, a mill that houses antique booths, a grocery store, and even a movie theater. Another mill has been converted into a brewery with an outdoor patio that overlooks the Androscoggin River. In a word, Brunswick, with its college and downtown area, is "quaint."

As could be expected, I attended *Bowdoin College* in downtown Brunswick. I graduated *Summa Cum Laude* in Economics, class of 1999. From there, I attended *Boston University* to pursue my *Master of Business Administration*. This means that I have a solid understanding of economics and how businesses operate. Journalism, and now Internet journalism, just came naturally to me.

*

So, all is right in my world. Good upbringing, good education, good job. And a dog. Life is perfect, right?

Inside, I'm a mess.

*

After a year off, traveling Europe, I returned home to make my fortune in the business world. I earned a master's in Business degree in 2003, and two years later, Sylvia Trevane and I decided to live together. We had started our relationship not long after I had received my master's, and we were perfect together. Plus, you can save money on rent, heat, and other utilities by doubling up and living together. So, why not become roommates? I mean "*roommates with benefits*?"

At that time in our lives, however, neither of us was ready for that "*final commitment*." Our mutual fears of "*locking down*" our relationship, however, eventually forestalled the inevitable. After ten years together, we finally got married. And we were both happy about that. Why had we waited ten years to make that everlasting commitment to each other? That was silly.

Plus, there were benefits to getting married. You can receive a marriage tax deduction, as well as add your spouse to your health and/or dental plan. And, if you have children, society will adjudge them to be "legitimate," as if legitimacy matters anymore. All are good reasons to marry, one would think.

The truth is that for both of us, the primary reason for getting married was to have children. Sylvia was twenty-five when we started living together in 2005; she had just turned thirty-five when we got married in 2015. The clock was ticking – children now, or children never.

Unfortunately, turns out that I don't produce very many tadpole troops, and that makes conception and even artificial insemination pretty difficult. Sylvia and I eventually resigned ourselves to life without children. Think about the small fortune Sylvia paid over the years for birth control – that was all for naught...

Another four years flew by, and suddenly we were both thirty-nine years old. I had excelled as a business consultant in Boston, earning a substantial income, and my career enabled me to live wherever I wanted. Sylvia was a physical therapist, so she could find a job anywhere she pleased. We both wanted to return to Maine and live there, and since her family was from the Bangor area, we moved to up-and-coming Bangor in 2019.

We had lived in Bangor for about three years when the unthinkable happened.

*

In December of 2022, Sylvia was killed by an underage drunk driver as she drove to a Carrabasset Valley ski area about a hundred miles from our home in Bangor. That drunk had been speeding in his father's sixty-two-hundred-pound F150 when he collided head-on with her small Toyota Yaris. She was killed instantly; the drunk barely had a scratch.

I can still hear the state trooper's voice when he delivered the news that Sylvia had been killed. I immediately got in my car and sped down to the Farmington on that frigid wintery Friday night. Sylvia's body had been removed by an ambulance; I had to identify the body at the hospital mortuary. Her face was crushed; her body crumpled. I can't describe the horror that I experienced that night. My darling Sylvia was gone, gone forever. I don't think I'll ever recover from that.

I don't want to talk about this any longer.

Chapter 13: Mlpita

On a more positive note, there's Mlpita, my dog.

Without children, Sylvia had to have a dog. She had to have something to care for; someone to talk to, to baby, to sing to. In 2016, she chose a "schnoodle," a cross between a schnauzer and a poodle. That mix made this mutt a "*designer dog*," a five-hundred-dollar designer mutt...

She named that schnoodle "*Charlie*." He was a great dog, fun to play with, not too demanding in terms of "play time," and he could entertain himself by climbing to the top of the stairs, rolling a ball down them, and then pursuing the ball to wherever it ended up. Charlie was a hoot. He died young, having developed mast cell tumors that we treated, but the tumors were too aggressive, so he succumbed at age seven in 2023.

*

With Charlie gone, Sylvia *had to have* another dog. I mean, she HAD TO HAVE another dog. When she got up in the morning, she would talk to Charlie, who listened along as if he understood her. She would sing to Charlie. She would take him on walks. She missed that when Charlie passed. And, I noticed, she was kind of depressed without a dog.

I didn't want another dog, but Sylvia, I knew, needed one. And before I knew it, there was "Max."

*

When Sylvia was killed, I "inherited" Max the mutt. I still mourn Sylvia; she was everything in the world to me, so I couldn't just dump her dog, though, to be honest, the thought had crossed my mind. But someone has to like me...

When we got Sylvia's new puppy, she was the one who named him "Max." Unlike Charlie, Max is extremely energetic. And I mean *extremely*. There's a *YouTube* video that says that "*Schnoodles are active dogs – they need an hour a day of activity time*." That's bullshit — Max requires at least three hours of activity time every day. And he'd be happier with five hours of play time. He'll bark at you, paw at you, stare at you until you

play with him. What a pain in the... Wait a minute, that's what his name should be.

Major League Pain in the Arse (MLPITA).

And that's why I changed his name to "Mlpita" about a year after the accident. Mlpita is a small dog; he weighs about sixteen pounds. Schnoodles are supposed not to shed — this one does. He's also a yapper; he barks at every "invader" he sees. He hates birds and squirrels. He dislikes mail carriers, UPS and FedEx delivery people, and even most of my neighbors, though I can't say I blame him for that; I'm not too fond of most of them either. Anyway, in Mlpita's mind, these invaders and trespassers all apparently pose threats to my well-being. So, he barks his head off at them should they enter my yard. Well, at least I'm well protected from the many potential threats to my life in my neighborhood, especially from dangerous squirrels...

I can't take yapper-boy with me when I travel, for obvious reasons. Hotel guests and cleaning people would not appreciate Mlpita's vociferous objections to their presence. Fortunately, my neighbor and his children like the mutt, so I have doggy day care whenever I leave on assignment.

Since Sylvia died, I've had difficulty getting back on track in the romantic relationship department. I can't seem to bring myself to start another serious relationship; my heart's just not in it. For now, and for the foreseeable future, it's just me — and Mlpita.

Chapter 14: POS 383

In the Spring 2025 semester, I had POS 383, a political science course, on my teaching schedule. POS 383 is a course on *American Constitutional Law* that examines the evolving nature of the U.S. Constitution through major Supreme Court decisions. We also cover federalism, the use of legislative power, the use of executive authority, and the necessity for judicial autonomy. With POTUS's over one hundred and twenty executive orders to date, with more assuredly to come in the weeks, months, and years ahead, this semester's course is chock-full of constitutional drama.

One of the things you learn after three decades of teaching is that you can't get up in front of a class and do straight lectures all of the time. You know that dynamic, the teaching style where the instructor, I, know everything, and show the class how brilliant I am, and essentially tell the class what to think. With the lecture approach, students sit and take notes, memorize the material, and then proceed on their own. It's okay sometimes, but generally that's not the way to teach. You must use the Socratic method and guide the class to an eventual answer or conclusion. Otherwise, things get really dull. Plus, you've got to get the students to think for themselves; you present the facts, and they've got to learn to reason out what has been given. Additionally, you must encourage debate and active participation to engage the class. I do all of those things.

*

Of course, my students had all heard about the POTUS/Mills spat on the previous Friday. So, they had an entire weekend to cogitate on what had just happened between the federal government and the state of Maine. They wondered if POTUS's action was legal. And, even more interesting to them was what my reaction would be to the situation. Our Monday, February 3rd class was going to be very interesting...

*

I had planned to open the class by reviewing what had happened between POTUS and Governor Mills, and then initiate a discussion on the constitutional implications of their actions. My "teacher's pet" saved me the trouble.

As class began, a Hispanic senior by the name of Fernando Rodríguez Iglesias Candelaria, whom everyone called 'Tito' for short, I know not why, had taken his usual front-row seat.

Tito and I go way back – I've known him since he was about five years old. Tito's father had come to this country as a migrant worker, picking the vast fields of Maine's trademark blueberries. It was backbreaking work where his father would have to bend, squat, or kneel for hours on end, placing blueberries into 10-30 pound "lugs" which needed to be carried across fields to waiting trucks. Over the years, Tito's father, Manuel, saved enough money to start a fruit and vegetable stand that became popular due to its freshness, competitive prices, and convenient location. I had met Tito as a child at that stand.

I pondered Tito's situation. It was unclear to me whether Manuel was an officially "documented" worker. However, Tito, born in America, was protected by the 14th Amendment, which guaranteed him citizenship because he was born in the United States, an Amendment that has become known as "birthright citizenship." It reads: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." At least Tito was, I believed, protected from deportation...

*

I could tell that Tito was feeling "chatty" as class started, so when he raised his hand, I allowed him to open the class.

"Professor Thomason," Tito opened, "Pursuant to the President's interaction with our Governor Mills yesterday, Governor Mills appears to be presenting a legal argument to the President that our hands are tied – that Title IX requires our state to allow trans athletes to compete in women's sports. Is that your take on this situation, and, if so, do we have a constitutional leg to stand on if we choose to battle the federal government?"

I like Tito. He's an aspiring law student, and I think he'll make a good legal analyst. Legal research involves examining statutes, regulations, and case law to provide attorneys with valuable insights and guidance. He'd also be good at case analysis – reviewing evidence, summarizing findings, and identifying relevant

legal precedents. He does, however, have a tendency to ask long-winded questions, which makes me think that he's struggling to articulate his point. Lawyers are usually more concise and quicker at making their points. He'll have to work on that if he chooses to become an attorney.

Of course, I had anticipated Tito's question. Mary and I had discussed POTUS's real goal, and I had looked up his Executive Order, so I was familiar with its language and intent. So, how was I going to frame my answer?

My goal was to help them figure out what was really happening by presenting the facts and letting them draw their own conclusions. I thought about Tito's question for a moment and formulated my answer. But first, I needed to break his question into two manageable parts.

So, Tito, your question has two parts. The first question is whether Governor Mills has a legal argument justifying her action; the second is 'Can we win?'

"Who, in this class, has heard about the *Education Amendments of 1972*, best known for a provision known as Title IX, which prohibits sex-based discrimination in federally funded education programs?" In this class of twenty-five students, all twenty-five hands were raised. They'd done their homework, or they had listened to the news broadcasts over the weekend, or they just YouTubed news analysis and opinions. Pretty much all news outlets had mentioned the amendment and its particular relevance to the Title IX provision.

"Okay. So what did you all see happen yesterday between POTUS and Governor Mills?"

The class was silent for a moment before Lucas Johnson, a junior known for being kind of a provocateur, spoke up. "I saw the President of the United States ask our governor if she would comply with his Executive Order to stop trans women from competing in women's sports, and she refused. He then told her if she did not, he'd cut our federal funding."

I thought that was a fair assessment. But then, to provoke me, he added: "And I happen to agree with the POTUS position." Little did he know that I did, too.

He was trying to provoke me, but I knew his real intention was to get my reaction to the situation, since I am a trans woman. I decided that responding to his question would turn into a discussion about transphobia, a topic I preferred not to discuss. But before I could answer, another student responded.

Elizabeth Atkinson, also a Junior, challenged Lucas's assessment of the situation. "Governor Mills said that Maine was already following the law, which, I think, is the Title IX law that the Professor just referred to. It says that you can't discriminate on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance. So, what POTUS is asking her to do would force her to disobey an existing federal law."

I interjected. "This is perfect! You both got straight to the constitutional issue right away. So, the question on the table is: Can a Presidential Executive Order overrule an existing federal law?" Remember, my course is on constitutional law, so this discussion takes us back to where we were supposed to focus on Constitutional Law.

During the first days of this course, we had read and discussed the U.S. Constitution. I had familiarized the students with it and subsequently tested their knowledge of it. They all knew that the U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the United States. That it establishes the framework of government – the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. And that it has a number of provisions in it that protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals. *But, would any of them remember Article VI, Clause 2?*

"Would anybody care to venture a guess on how to resolve this conflict between an executive order and a federal law?" I asked.

Another student, Jane something-or-other from Sagadahoc County, I think from Bath, suggested that the President's order should take precedent over an educational act from 1972 because the President, as a recently elected representative of the people, has to guide our country. And that educational act was passed

over fifty years ago and should no longer take precedence." What she was really saying was that we should all mindlessly follow the leader, POTUS, and his policies to guide us into economic prosperity — to make America great again. Given the POTUS' anti-LGBTQ position, I now refer to MAGA as "make America straight again...". If I were to give students a day-by-day grade, she would have gotten an "F" for that observation. Naive as hell.

"Well, class, here's the situation. The *Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution, Article VI, Clause 2,* establishes that federal law takes precedence over state law in cases of conflict. But, in this case, Title IX is a federal law. So, Governor Mills was put in a position of having to follow an executive order or abiding by an existing federal law. She rightfully chose to follow the federal law, as she is legally obliged to do."

"So, an executive order is more like a policy dictate, but not a law?" Tito questioned. "But what about the second part of my original question? Will the state win this argument?"

Nice job, Tito, I thought.

"Ahh," I said, "Will the state win the argument?" I paused for dramatic effect and then explained Janet's options. "So, here's the situation. States cannot simply disregard federal laws unless they successfully challenge them in court or find legal grounds to refuse enforcement."

"So, if that's the case," Elizabeth Atkinson rejoined the conversation, "Governor Mills can defeat POTUS's order if she establishes that Title IX is the law of the land. Is that right?"

"Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding," I replied, giving her my famous game-show-host smile. "Not only are you right, but now you've come to the hidden aspect of the dispute between POTUS and the Governor. The Executive Order denies human rights, and it shunts aside DEI policies that provide protection against discrimination and allow equality and inclusion for LGBTQ+ communities in Maine. Does she really want to take on that battle?"

*

There was some rumbling coming from the back of the classroom. The acoustics in that room project well. I thought I heard someone say "Fuck those gay bastards." Implied were "Fuck those lesbians, fuck those bisexuals, fuck those trans people, fuck those queers."

"Does someone in the back of the room have a comment they wish to share?" I sternly asked.

No one was forthcoming, but a couple of students who had been previously smirking suddenly looked contrite, like they had been found out. I let it go. No matter where you go, you can always find an ignoramus or two in any crowd.

*

"Okay, then, back to the topic at hand." The question remained on the table. "Does the Governor of Maine want to challenge an Executive Order that denies basic human rights to its citizens?"

I could see that the situation had started to resonate with the students. Diminutive Sarah McLaughlin, a local Bangor student, finally voiced it. "So, this whole thing is a fairness issue?"

"Not only fairness, but safety for those LGBTQ+ amongst us," I added. I thought back to my Nazi comparison – this was also about safety for a class of people who had been targeted.

The rest of the class rumbled. Even the idiots in the back got the message. The Governor of Maine had not only taken a legal position, but she had also, either accidentally or purposefully, taken a moral position on the fairness and safety of the Executive Order.

As usual, teacher's pet, Tito, spoke up. "So, how does this whole situation make you feel, Professor Thomason?"

Lucas Johnson, my provocateur, joined the conversation again. He was determined to steer the discussion to a discussion about transphobia and homophobia. I had an entire weekend to prepare my answer to this question, but I still didn't want to veer into that discussion.

"We're supposed to be studying constitutional law here," I replied, "So let's take a look at previous legislative attempts to marginalize gender affirming communities."

I steered the topic back to constitutional law. "First of all, these kinds of governmental attacks against gender affirming communities are not new. Back in 2015, in a case decided by the United States Supreme Court, the Obergefell v. Hodges decision that granted same-sex couples the right to marriage, far-right groups started to push for bills that limit or trample on the rights of gender affirming communities. In 2023, 575 bills were introduced in 41 states. These bills sought to ban gender affirming care, for instance, hormone treatments. They sought to eliminate trans-women from participating in women's sports. They sought to prevent transgender people from sharing bathrooms that match their gender identities. They sought to eliminate drag shows. And more, and more, and more. Eighty of those bills passed at the state level. However, what is different is that we're seeing a shift in gender controls from state control to federal control. And, as you all know, federal laws supersede state laws."

As part of my Socratic teaching method, I let that sink in. It would force someone in the class to ask the obvious question. Sure enough...

"Can you explain what you mean by this broad-based attack being spearheaded by the federal government?" asked a student from Eastport, over in Washington County.

"The best way to answer that is to show you how the federal government introduces anti-LGBTQ+ legislation into law. For instance, just a few years ago, a provision known as H.R. 5 directly introduced the *Parents' Bill of Rights*, which included book bans related to transgender situations. Last year, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act, with a below-the-belt rider that outlawed gender affirming care for service members and their families. Also, students at *Department of Defense* schools are not allowed to conduct drag performances, raise their Pride flags, and books on transgender people are not allowed. In these and other cases, the federal government has been seeking to outlaw gender affirming care; they have sought a license to discriminate that

would allow the federal government not to enforce federal protections for gender affirming communities. Legislators also try to block rulemaking that advantages gender affirming communities, and they attempt to block the enforcement of non-discriminatory protections. And they attempt to undermine or attack Discrimination, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) measures whenever possible. And last, but not least, if you don't like DEI programs, simply underfund or cut their finances. It is becoming de rigueur to create roadblocks and restrictions to undermine the basic human rights of our fellow citizens."

The class had been largely unaware of the sometimes above-board and sometimes behind-the-scenes attempts by the federal government to deny gender identity.

"So, what can be done to stop this anti-gender behavior?" asked Elizabeth Atkinson, the student who had identified that Governor Mills only choice to comply with the POTUS's no transwomen in women's sports directive.

"Well, Elizabeth, states and voters can do several things to resist federal government anti-gender legislation. They can refuse to enforce federal laws, but that approach usually results in the feds and states being taken back to court. They can challenge federal laws in court, arguing that they exceed constitutional limits. States can also nullify federal rulings on the basis that they violate constitutional rights – again, another trip back to court. Or, voters can protest, and attempt to get legislators to change their minds, or vote in new, more sympathetic to their cause legislators into office."

There was a general rumbling among the students, as many of them had interpreted the observation as a call to action. The student body could organize protests if they felt compelled to do so. But I was not yet compelled to go militant. That is, until a significant issue arose between me and the College...

Chapter 15: The Political Fallout

I left Bangor at 6:30 a.m., bound for the State House to interview Janet Mills potentially. Augusta is only an hour from Bangor, so it was a quick and easy trip. I presented my press credentials to the pretty, young receptionist, and she smiled as she examined my creds: "*Oh, you're Alex Monroe, I watch your stories all the time. I love PCPTV,*" she effused. But there was more there than just "I like your station." She liked *me*, I could tell. I was promptly shown to the conference room where the press briefing was scheduled to take place.

I thought about the receptionist's comment. People genuinely appreciate our *digital-first* network. Instead of being print- or broadcast-focused, we present concise video stories that get right to the point, and we make them available for immediate streaming. No more waiting for the "*News Hour*." You can get breaking news from us at any hour of any given day.

*

At nine o'clock, Governor Mills arrived and began speaking to the press about the POTUS incident. I recorded it, put my story together, and got it streamed about twenty minutes later. Fast, fast, fast...

While I was producing my story, I missed some comments that she had made after the conference, including one directed at one of my fellow reporters. She told him that:

> "In my conversation with the President last week, unfortunately, he made the statement I have never heard any president say before. That HE is the law. He said, 'I, or we, are the federal law.' It's like Louis XIV, you know? L'État, c'est moi. That's not the authority of the president. You can't, you can't create laws by thinking them, by tweeting them, by issuing press releases, by issuing executive orders. Congress makes the laws. The president, as the head of the executive branch, executes the laws. Faithfully."

I missed her saying this because I was already writing and exiting my story. I felt as though I'd been scooped. That video was subsequently posted on YouTube at this location.

My thoughts on this interview: *Right-on, Janet! Screw his Kingship…*

*

The Governor Mills/POTUS spat had happened on a Friday, just before the weekend, and it made national news. It received national coverage, which I thought was presented as a "curiosity." "Hey, look, the Governor of Maine just stood up to POTUS." News reporters didn't quite know what to make of the POTUS/Mills disagreement, so they just reported it as something interesting that had just happened. It got good coverage in Portland and a smattering of coverage here and there in the Bangor area.

In Maine, press interviews over the weekend focused on the reactions of various state legislators to the spat between the POTUS and Mills. Of course, the Democrats, members of Mills' party, supported her, while the Republicans in the State Senate and Legislature vocally opposed Governor Mills' "extreme WOKE" position. The Republicans accused Governor Mills of being "reckless" – and they viewed her opposition to POTUS as "shameful."

*

Former Maine Governor Paul LePage, whom I voted for in a previous election and who lost to Janet Mills in their most recent head-to-head race in 2022, also expressed his support for POTUS. And worse yet, he seems to have bought into the POTUS attack plan of using transgender sports as a fall guy as he runs for Congress in 2026. His direct quote was: "We need people who will fight the *extreme woke policies* that defy common sense and force girls into unfair sports competitions."

Wow, do they have to keep hammering that point? The number of trans-girls competing in girls' sports is infinitesimally small. Lepage had earned my vote when elected in 2010 on a platform of fiscal conservatism and reducing government spending. He'll

not get my vote this time when he runs next year because of his DEI position. *We, Mr. Lepage, are voters, too.*

*

Republican State Representative Katrina Smith supported the POTUS' stance; she was another one who argued that transgender athletes should not compete in women's sports.

*

I appreciate the way Kit Thomson Crossman of the *Maine Human Rights Commission* framed the issue of trans girls in girls' sports. According to Maine Public Radio, Crossman told them: "*The Maine Human Rights Act* protects trans students in the same way it protects all other students. So, you have to have equal opportunity in their school athletic programs. *Not special treatment,* just equal access to participate if they want to." And right there is the heart of this trans athletics issue. The LAW requires *equal access to participate*, it does not require special treatment, as in special bathrooms for trans people, or allowing trans-girls to use the ladies room. That law clearly needs to be changed to disallow "*equal access to participate*."

Chapter 16: Trans Sports?

I got together with Mary the Wednesday after the POTUS–Mills blow-up. We were having dinner and drinks at my place when the conversation drifted — inevitably — to the whole trans-girls-in-girls-sports firestorm.

Mary dove in first.

"Look how ridiculous this is," she said, waving her fork for emphasis. "We have, what, two trans students in the entire state participating in girls' sports? Two. And he's going to rain holy hell down on us over that? It's not an epidemic; it's a mosquito. And he's firing a cannon."

"He's definitely heavy-handed," I agreed. "Way, way, way, way, way over the top."

But even as I said it, I felt that knot in my stomach.

Was now the moment to tell her?

Was I really going to say this out loud?

I knew she wouldn't like it.

But it needed to be said.

*

"Well," I began carefully, "just so you know, I have... a little issue with how Title IX has been interpreted. And I'm sure this will surprise you."

I rolled my chair over to my computer and pulled up the statute.

"Here's the exact wording: 'No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in... any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.'"

Mary frowned. "I don't get it. It says 'no person.' That includes trans people. Trans people are people, just like heterosexual people, right?"

"Yes."

"So, you support those people in girls' sports, right?"

I took a breath.

Time to stop dodging.

"No. I don't."

Her eyebrows shot up.

"I think Title IX is being misinterpreted," I continued. "Yes, trans men and women are people. Yes, we deserve equal treatment. But there are obvious, biological realities that matter in competitive sports. Trans girls like me—we have XY chromosomes, testosterone histories, and a physiology that's fundamentally different from biological women. Those differences don't disappear just because our gender identity is female."

Mary stared at me, stunned.

"So, you're saying you don't support trans athletes?" she asked slowly.

"In this specific context? No. I don't."

The silence between us stretched.

*

Later, I sat at my desk and opened my laptop. I asked my AI companion, "What percentage of Maine residents support trans athletes in women's sports?"

Up came the answer:

A recent University of New Hampshire Survey Center poll found that 29% of Mainers support allowing transgender female athletes to compete in women's sports, while 64% oppose it, and 7% are unsure.

I read it aloud.

Mary blinked. "Holy smokes. That's almost three-quarters of the state. I had no idea."

"Exactly," I said. "People aren't buying the idea that biological males should compete with women."

“Well, I’m a woman,” she countered, “and I’ve got no problem with it.”

To me, that felt naïve.

“Think of it from a biological female athlete’s perspective,” I said. “Imagine you’re a top miler in high school, aiming for a state title. Now imagine a biological male — who placed tenth in the boys’ division last year — switches to girls’ track. Because of male physiological advantages, he becomes the state champion. Suddenly, your shot at that title is gone. And maybe your shot at a scholarship too.”

I shook my head. “That’s not fairness. That’s not equality. And it turns trans women into villains — exactly the narrative POTUS wants.”

Chapter 17: Using Trans-Sports as a Weapon

After I had made my opinion of trans women in female sports known, Mary had a breakthrough realization. What POTUS is doing with his anti-DEI agenda suddenly became obvious to her.

"There's a subtlety here," she observed. "It's not really about transgender sports, is it?" Mary paused as she thought through the Presidential anti-trans position.

"What POTUS is really doing is *using transgender sports as a means to drive a wedge between the LGBTQ+ communities and the heterosexual community*! He's focusing on transgender sports to make trans people the enemy whose wicked ways must be defeated."

"Exactly," I confirmed.

She had hit the nail on the head; this was really the bottom line of the POTUS attack on our Governor. His position is that there are only two genders associated with our male and female physiques: male and female. And anyone who sees their genders differently, whether they be trans, queer, etc., should be dismissed out of hand as some sort of lunatic or pervert, and their DEI protections should be null-and-void.

"The way he is going about this is very sly," Mary observed. "He has identified that, as the surveys show, most Americans don't want trans women in women's sports. So, he's using that one single example of gender identity to push his anti-LGBTQ+ agenda to the masses."

"I'm afraid so," I acknowledged. "And don't be surprised if he keeps doing this. He knows his anti-trans athlete's message resonates with people, and he's very good at repeating it over and over again; he knows repetition is effective. He'll keep repeating his anti-trans in women's sports mantra as a means to alienate us from heterosexuals, and as a means to break down Title IX protections for the entire LGBTQ+ community."

We ended our discussions at around nine p.m.; Mary headed home, and I did the dishes before going back to my laptop to do some more research. We would do dinner at her place tomorrow.

Chapter 18: A Little More Digging

That evening, both Mary and I, independently, did a little more digging into the cause of the POTUS/Mills flare-up. I found the POTUS *Executive Order* dated January 25th that was at the heart of the matter.

I particularly like the title of that new order: "Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism And Restoring Biological Truth To The Federal Government – The White House." That title is kind of a dead giveaway as to the administration's intentions. First, people who believe that they are wired differently than their anatomy indicates are now "*gender extremists*." Second, it is being pitched as a means to *protect* women. Protect them from what? We trans-women are women inside – what attacks are they protecting our sisters, *biological women*, from?

I continued reading the Executive Order. It points out, no, it insists that there are only two sexes: male and female.

> *Sec. 2. Policy and Definitions. It is the policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female. These sexes are not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality. Under my direction, the Executive Branch will enforce all sex-protective laws to promote this reality...*

My immediate reaction was*: "I guess I no longer exist. "I don't fit that classification. I am a woman! My body parts can't define me!"*

*

At her apartment, Mary was doing the same thing. She pulled up a Web page and accessed the DEI-related Executive Order recently signed by the President. Mary observed that not only does the order seek to deny trans people their civil rights, but it

goes on to target '*gender ideology*' initiatives, and claims that their gender claims are false:

> *"Gender ideology" replaces the biological category of sex with an ever-shifting concept of self-assessed gender identity, permitting the false claim that males can identify as and thus become women and vice versa, and requiring all institutions of society to regard this* ***false claim*** *as accurate. Gender ideology includes the idea that there is a vast spectrum of genders that are disconnected from one's sex. Gender ideology is internally inconsistent, in that it diminishes sex as an identifiable or useful category but nevertheless maintains that it is possible for a person to be born in the wrong sexed body.*

False claim? False claim? This is truly Neanderthalic thinking... Olivia knows that she was born in the "wrong sexed body." She's living proof that there are more than two genders!

Mary kept reading. The executive order goes on to claim that it is protecting heterosexual men and women by taking an anti-LGBTQ+ position. And provides the following guidance:

> *Each agency and all Federal employees shall enforce laws governing sex-based rights, protections, opportunities, and accommodations to protect men and women as biologically distinct sexes. Each agency should therefore give the terms "sex", "male", "female", "men", "women", "boys" and "girls" the meanings set forth in section 2 of this order when interpreting or applying statutes, regulations, or guidance and in all other official agency business, documents, and communications.*

Mary remembered the old saying: "*Boys will be boys*." She recalled that the saying had been around since the 16th century and was intended to excuse rowdy or foolish behavior in boys. And she remembered the old saying, "And girls will be girls." That one was from the Victorian days.

She extrapolated the more modern, up-to-date axioms and muttered to herself: "*In this age of gender fluidity, we should also add: boys will be girls, and girls will be boys...*"

With that, she called it a day.

Chapter 19: Brunch with the "Vixen Trickster"

At the end of the week, on Saturday morning, we had planned brunch together at Mary's place. Mary's apartment is a college-owned unit rented to faculty members. It is located in a large 1840s Victorian home just off-campus. The College had divided the large, mansion-like house into fourths; Mary had the bottom-floor apartment to the right. The apartment to the left was the mirror image, only inverted. And the two apartments on the second floor also mirrored each other.

Mary's decorating style is what I call "*academic antique eclectic*." She has framed old maps of the world, framed historical scenes, and several artifacts dating back to colonial New England. The walls in her dining room are coral in color, and she has used gold frames to create a look that's very "English traditional," somewhat "manorly."

The kitchen is sage in color and features a very high-end, extremely pricey stove: a *La Cornue Cornufe 110 Range*. This stove has powerful gas burners and double electric convection ovens. It also has French side-swing doors. A high-end stove like this one is not affordable on a teacher's salary, but it came along with the apartment, courtesy of the previous occupants. There are some things you just can't take with you. If you ever wonder why I always go to Mary's apartment to cook fancy meals, you now have your answer.

Mary's bedroom is traditional, painted a federal blue, which complements the historical theme of her apartment. She also has an antique, four-post bed and a pair of old tiger-oak dressers. She's kind of messy; she leaves clothes strewn all around the room, her shoes are right in the runway between her bed and the bathroom, right where you're guaranteed to trip over them. Mary also lays out her change in outfits in advance every day. She spreads out outfits on her bed, ready for outfit changes to accommodate the sometimes-wild daily temperature fluctuations. Who does that?

Her house is otherwise clean and organized, but her bedroom is her bedroom, and in it, she's a slob.

Her living room has several six-foot-tall bookcases that were built by one of her former students. They occupy an entire wall behind her couch and contain various antique volumes that range in coverage from France's New World territory, known as *New France*, to modern-day history volumes. Mary loves to read: I'll bet she's read every page of every book in her collection.

For the most part, Mary prefers antique furniture, except for the long, comfortable leather couch and love seat in her living room. She has antique dressers, antique tables, an antique dining room set, an antique settee, and a special antique radio.

That radio is indeed "special." It's an upright, 1930s radio that doesn't work. But I didn't know that. So, when she first showed it to me, I heard it playing an episode of *The Lone Ranger* – a 1930s-era serial radio broadcast. "Listen to this," she said excitedly. "It's amazing," she declared. "That's the Lone Ranger and Tonto!" She paused to increase my curiosity and build suspense. "I just got this 1930s radio, and it's constantly playing old radio series from the 1930s. And before this," she said with a sincere/excited look on her face, "I heard one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's *Fireside Chats*!"

How can this be possible? I wondered. *Have I just entered a time warp that beamed me back to the 1930s*? "Wow – listen to that!" I exclaimed, also excited. "This is unbelievable!" I declared. "I wonder how they..." and I stopped in my tracks because I noticed that Mary was laughing at me. She was practically doubling over with laughter.

It took a minute, but then she "fessed up." "I have a streaming speaker inside the radio near where the speakers are located," she laughingly admitted. "I'm using a music service to stream this 1930s radio show." She was smiling broadly and laughing at me.

She had "sucked me in." I initially felt the fool, but then I, too, smiled and laughed. Shaking my head from side to side, I chastised Mary: "*You little vixen trickster*!" I exclaimed.

She loved that she could pull one over on me. It doesn't happen all that often... But it was funny.

Chapter 20: "Preposterous Reality!"

One of the things Mary and I have in common is that we both enjoy cooking gourmet meals, and this brunch was no exception. Mary's kitchen was plenty big for both of us, so we created our menu and shared the cooking responsibilities. We started with my trademark truffle-infused mushroom frittata, while Mary worked on her Brioche French toast with berry compote – mmmm, scrumptious. She also purchased fresh fruits, including kiwis, apricots, melons, pears, and apples, and coated her fruit plate with whipped honey. Decadent.

While she was doing her thing, I served the refreshments: Mimosas with fresh-squeezed orange juice. We would both have to hit the gym on Sunday...

*

Over brunch, we each described the research that we had conducted on Wednesday evening. Mary, too, had examined the *Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism* Executive Order and commented: "This law is apparently meant to 'protect' men and women as biologically distinct sexes."

Protect men and women from what? I had asked when I had done my research. Less than seven percent of the U.S. population identifies as LGBTQ+, and only one percent as trans. "What are those few trans people a major threat to?"

"I think that I found the answer," she offered. "Here's what I think they're out to protect," she said as she handed me a printed page.

> *This unhealthy road is paved by an ongoing and purposeful attack against the ordinary and longstanding use and understanding of biological and scientific terms, replacing the immutable biological reality of sex with an internal, fluid, and subjective sense of self unmoored from biological facts. Invalidating the true and biological category of "woman"* ***improperly transforms laws and policies designed to protect sex-based***

> ***opportunities into laws and policies that undermine them****, replacing longstanding, cherished legal rights and values with an identity-based, inchoate social concept."*

After reading the quote, I reacted with: "Apparently, we are conducting '*an ongoing and purposeful attack*' on biological men and women. *How?"* I wondered. "Just because we identify differently, we're now conducting an '*attack on heterosexuals*?' It boggles the mind."

"Look at this." Mary observed, "I think this is the answer," as she handed me another printed page. "You are replacing the '*immutable biological reality of their sex' with the* ***preposterous reality*** *that some people have an 'internal, fluid, and subjective sense of themselves.' This ideal and reality undermine the 'cherished legal rights and values" of biological men and women*."

You can almost feel the hate in that quote. I apparently have a fluid sense of myself. Does that mean one day I'm a guy, the next a girl, and the next a pickle? And because I exist, and because I'm trans, I'm undermining "the cherished legal rights" of others? So other people, presumably heterosexuals, have rights, but I do not? I wondered who the "*God-Squad bigot"* who wrote this crap was.

We continued our conversation. "So, I guess we're attacking them with a preposterous reality?" I ventured.

"Yes," Mary confirmed. "You and your people are attacking us women with your preposterous reality. You should be ashamed of yourselves."

"How stupid; how ignorant," I shook my head in disbelief. "This is so stupid, I don't think a total ignoramus could make this kind of stuff up. But, perhaps a room full of Bible-toting far-right ignoramuses could, though."

Mary paused and then interpreted the cryptic meaning of the *Executive Order* declaration for me. In a high, distressed, sarcastic, Southern voice, she declared: "Apparently, you are threatening my womanhood because you believe you're a woman.

Your belief that you're a woman scares me – so I need, no, make that 'I require' protection. I'm like a little wilting flower over your threat to my womanhood. Somebody please protect me!"

When we were done laughing, she added: "I'm shaking in my boots..."

My retort: "Well, I hope you're shaking in those white, knee-high go-go boots you wear. I love those boots." She did have a pair of white go-gos. They remind me of Nancy Sinatra's *These Boots Are Made for Walking* outfit of the 1960s.

*

We kept reading through the *Executive Order*. Because us trans people are threatening the civil rights of biological women, the federal government stated its punitive measures. It was the constant threat from POTUS: federal funds would be withheld.

> *Federal funds shall not be used to promote gender ideology. Each agency shall assess grant conditions and grantee preferences and ensure grant funds do not promote gender ideology.*

"Arrrrrrrrgh!" I said, frustrated by this rampant stupidity. "Unbelievable. Unfathomable. Is this the United States of America? Should I move somewhere safe?" I seriously considered that idea for a moment. I quickly reconsidered: "Nah, that would just play into the desire of this administration to purge us out of existence. I'm not going anywhere!"

Chapter 21: The "Sources of the Hate" Discussion

With brunch finished, we turned to the aftermath—piles of dishes, splattered pans, and the usual chaos we created whenever we cooked together. I washed; Mary dried and put things away. It was our ritual, and our conversation flowed as naturally as the running water.

"This anti-LGBTQ+ attack on our individuality is a catastrophe for the United States," I said, scrubbing a skillet. "This anti-DEI Executive Order is a message of division. It targets a specific minority group. It's a message of hate."

Mary didn't miss a beat. "And it reeks of homophobia and transphobia. It reflects prejudice, aversion, and open hostility toward gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals. And it clearly encourages discrimination against transgender people."

"I'll see you and raise you one," I said, poker-faced as I attacked a stubborn patch of egg. "It also reflects biphobia — bias against bisexual people. And queerphobia — hostility toward all LGBTQ+ identities."

Mary paused mid-dry. "I wonder what the genesis of all this hatred is."

*

I had thought about that question for years. And every time, I came back to the same infuriating conclusion: this administration had hijacked religion to justify its cruelty.

"My take?" I said. "Certain religions — and certain states and countries — specifically target gender-diverse people. Here in America, the far-right Bible-belt crowd is the most obvious. They weaponize their conservative interpretations of scripture to justify their hatred. Those scriptures oppose same-sex relationships and gender variance, so we become the targets."

I rinsed a plate and continued. "The Bible is two thousand years old. They had no concept of alternate genders back then, though they certainly knew what homosexuality was. My favorite example is Leviticus 20:13: 'If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both

of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death.'"

"So, if someone is gay, just kill them," Mary said, shaking her head. "Yeah, that'll solve the 'problem.' Just kill them." She sighed. "And there are several more quotes like that. So much for 'Love thy neighbor.'"

We worked in silence for a moment, the clink of dishes filling the space.

Then Mary spoke again. "I think America is becoming one of those societies that targets alternative gender identities. We're targeting gender at both the religious and state levels."

I handed her a rinsed frying pan. "And here's a comforting thought," I added dryly. "In some interpretations of Islamic law, homosexuality is considered a serious offense, with historical rulings prescribing severe punishments — including execution. Just following what the 'Good Book' says."

Mary shook her head again, slower this time. "If you're saying religious beliefs are behind this anti-LGBTQ legislation, then I agree. Conservative, God-fearing, right-wing churches have a lot to do with this."

She continued, "And this administration is making policy based on their evangelical beliefs, which violates the First Amendment."

She quoted the clause from memory:

> *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...*

I sharpened her point. "You mean they're driving their evangelical beliefs over us. They believe everyone should be a devout Christian just like them. And here's the kicker: they treat the Bible as the ultimate authority, and they're determined to force their biblical interpretations into our laws. They're using the government to push an evangelical Christian Nationalist agenda."

Mary heard the agitation in my voice. She softened her tone. "Still, some progressive churches are trying to reconcile faith with diverse gender identities. Episcopals, UCC, Presbyterians — they allow LGBTQ clergy."

I nodded. "Those churches get it. They're doing the morally correct thing."

I hesitated before continuing. "But others are hurting the cause. I grew up Catholic. The Catholic Church teaches that gender is inseparable from biological sex — just like this Executive Order. They say human identity is rooted in being created male or female. They insist people should accept their bodies as a gift from God and discourage the idea that gender can be self-defined or changed."

Mary looked genuinely shocked. "Surely that's no longer the case today."

"It is," I said. "Pope Francis spoke out against gender ideology. He argued that biological sex and gender roles can be distinguished but not separated. And there are 1.4 billion Catholics in the world. That's 1.4 billion people being told that gender identity can't be separated from anatomy."

"Hopefully the new Pope will fix this," Mary offered.

"I wouldn't count on it," I said flatly.

*

What I didn't say — what neither of us touched — was the irreparable harm done by predator priests over decades, and the Church's refusal to confront it. I couldn't help wondering whether that history, that shame, had twisted the Church's doctrine on gender identity into something even more rigid and punitive.

Chapter 22: The Targeting of Fellow Citizens

With the dishes finished, it was time to head home. As I walked to my house, I reflected on what Mary and I had discussed at brunch. *Had we been here before?*

Some people study history to understand what happened in the past, in order to avoid repeating those mistakes in the present. For some reason, after discussing the current administration's hateful anti-gender doctrine, my mind kept flashing to Nazi Germany. So, when I got home, I did an AI query. I asked my AI assistant:

Did the Nazis create laws that specifically targeted the Jews? And the answer was:

"Yes, the Nazis enacted numerous laws targeting Jewish people, systematically stripping them of rights and isolating them from society. Some of the most infamous laws include:

- *The Nuremberg Laws* (1935): These laws defined who was considered Jewish based on ancestry and prohibited marriages between Jews and non-Jews.
- *The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service* (1933): This law removed Jewish professionals, including doctors, teachers, and lawyers, from their jobs.
- *The Law Concerning Admission to the Legal Profession* (1933): It barred Jews from becoming lawyers.
- *Decree Regarding Physicians' Services* (1933): Jewish doctors were excluded from the national health system.
- *Education Restrictions*: Laws limited Jewish students' access to schools and universities.
- *World War II-era Laws*: Between 1939 and 1942, hundreds of additional laws further isolated Jews, including curfews, ration card markings, and bans on purchasing certain goods."

The words "*isolating them from society*" really stuck in my craw because that's what the current administration is doing to my LGBTQ+ community. Will this situation get worse, like it did for the unsuspecting Jews? And will it ultimately result in government violence turned against us?

*

In my brain, a robotic voice kept saying: "*You must assimilate. You must comply. You must fit into the box that your physical gender dictates.*"

What are we, the Borg?

Chapter 23: The Movie

The next evening, Mary and I took a rare night apart. We spend most of our week together, but sometimes we need to retreat into our own corners — books, research, writing, or just the comfort of our separate screens. Four or five nights a week we're inseparable; the rest, we drift. We're close, but not fused.

Our tastes in entertainment don't overlap anyway. Mary loves romantic comedies and serialized dramas; I prefer spy thrillers, documentaries, and films that begin and end in one sitting. Alone nights are when I get to watch exactly what I want.

*

After a long day of teaching, I came home, changed out of my wool skirt and blouse, and slipped into jeans, a T-shirt, and a blue cardigan. Dinner was a simple spinach salad with my beloved Ken's Steak House dressing. I washed the dishes, settled onto the couch, and reached for a film I hadn't watched in years. It took a while, but I finally found it.

Network.

A mid-1970s masterpiece. Four Oscars. Peter Finch's posthumous Best Actor win. Practically forgotten now, but unforgettable to me.

I first looked for it on my streaming services, but it wasn't streaming anywhere. So I went to my basemen and found it on a bookshelf. I had maybe a hundred movies in my DVD collection and Network is one of them. And yes, I still have a DVD player. They still come in useful every once in a while.

I went back upstairs and loaded the movie into my player. The picture quality was terrible, but the content was what mattered.

The film hit me harder than I expected.

*

A news anchor pushed past his breaking point, furious at a society collapsing under greed, corruption, and apathy. His monologue was a primal scream against the feeling that ordinary people had no power left. And then came the line that shook the world:

"I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!"

In the film, people fling open their windows and shout it into the night. A collective eruption. A refusal to stay numb.

*

Somewhere between Finch's fury and the echo of those shouted lines, something inside me snapped into focus.

Because I realized I had become exactly what he was railing against.

I had been sitting on my couch — watching, waiting, hoping the system would correct itself — as POTUS and his administration bulldozed norms, seized powers that weren't theirs, accepted blatant conflicts of interest, and treated the Constitution like toilet paper.

Why had I been so quiet?

Why had I trusted the guardrails to hold?

I had believed in checks and balances. I had believed the courts would intervene. I had believed the system would save itself.

But the administration moved like a blitzkrieg, dismantling those safeguards faster than anyone could respond. Every unconstitutional act was tossed to the courts, and when district courts ruled against them, the cases were rushed to a sympathetic Supreme Court — the same Court that granted POTUS sweeping immunity for "official acts," gutting the principle that no one is above the law.

The system I had spent my career teaching — my intellectual home, my professional identity — was in tatters, collapsing in real time.

And I was just sitting there. A political science professor. A citizen. A witness. Doing nothing.

The realization hit me with the force of Finch's monologue.

It was time to get mad.

And it was time to stop taking this anymore.

Chapter 24: The Tipping Point

The more I thought about the situation we were living in, the hotter the anger burned. It felt like this administration was peeling away the country's economic strength, its moral backbone, its healthcare safety nets — layer by layer — while simultaneously going after schools, universities, newsrooms, and the courts. Undermine, intimidate, control. That seemed to be the playbook.

And closer to home, it was my civil rights — my dignity — that were being carved up by the same sanctimonious, self-righteous band of governmental hoodlums and thugs.

Then my thoughts drifted to the voters who put him in office. Seriously? This was the man entrusted with the presidency? A man accused by more than two dozen women of sexual misconduct; a man who paid hush money to a porn star; a man with extramarital affairs; a tangle of business scandals; and a temperament that seemed... volatile. And you handed him the nuclear launch codes. It felt like madness.

*

Eventually, the sheer recklessness of the administration shoved me past my tipping point. The economic chaos, the trade wars, the dismantling of federal agencies, the layoffs, the gutting and restructuring of *Health and Human Services*—now, in my mind, the *Department for the Denial of Health and Human Services*. I snapped.

I wasn't going to sit quietly anymore. I was going to add my voice to the growing chorus of people protesting the actions of the President and his entourage of administrators, bureaucrats, and sycophants.

A few moments later, I walked to my office window, slid it open, and felt the cold air rush in. Something in me had finally shifted. I'd gotten my dander up, gotten off my ass, and decided to push back against what felt like government tyranny.

I drew in a breath and shouted, full-throated and unrestrained:

"I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!"

It wasn't just a yell — it was a detonation. A thunderous, booming, cathartic release that shook something loose inside me. And damn, it felt good. Better than good. It felt like the first real exhale I'd taken in months.

That shout was my first protest. The first of many, I hoped. In that moment — standing at my window, voice echoing into the world — I became an activist.

Chapter 25: Dad's Advice

When I make major decisions —especially ones as consequential as joining a protest movement — I take a personal inventory. I want to understand my motivations with clarity, not impulse. What exactly am I trying to accomplish? Which government actions need to be reversed? Why am I protesting? Where are the nearest demonstrations? Which movement should I align myself with?

To answer those questions, I reached back to the legacy of inherited wisdom from my father. When I was growing up, Dad was a newspaper reporter, and he approached everything—events, business dilemmas, personal crises—with the same disciplined framework: treat it like a news story. No matter the situation, he relied on the same set of interrogatives: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? If he could answer those, he could write the story.

What I didn't appreciate until much later was that those same questions could be used to understand not just events, but emotions—motives, fears, frustrations, the whole messy interior life.

I learned that early. When I kept getting in trouble at school, Dad didn't scold me. He investigated. Who was involved? What was happening? When did it start? Where did it occur? Why was it happening? How was it unfolding? His questions led him to the truth: I wasn't misbehaving; I was being bullied. He marched into the school, confronted the administrators, and—just like that—my "disciplinary problem" evaporated. Dad's method wasn't just journalism. It was diagnosis.

He used the same approach years later when he realized his only child — me — was trans. I imagine his internal monologue went something like this:

Who? Olivia.

What? Says he/she is transsexual.

When? Signs appeared around age six or seven.

Where? Here, at home.

Why? Unknown—and that bothered him enough to dig.

How? By researching, reading psychology journals, scouring the Internet, and talking with my counselor.

His conclusion was simple: this is who I am. There was no drama, no rejection, no tortured soul-searching. Just a quiet, steady acceptance. Dad never made it complicated.

*

So, I decided to apply his method to my own desire to become an activist. What were my true motivations? What story was I trying to write with my actions?

Who?

Me, obviously. But I wondered whether Mary would walk this path with me. If she did, then the "who" became "us." And, of course, the other "who" was the President—the person whose policies I wanted to influence.

What?

I intended to protest the administration's actions, especially its DEI policies. The President's Executive Order stripped me of my rights to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. I wasn't trying to overturn an election—just over half the country voted for him, and the right deserves representation. But eliminating my DEI protections and imposing religious-right rules? That was a hard no. Immigration, tariffs, even the Department of Education—those weren't my battles. DEI was.

When?

Before it's too late. Before the administration's growing authoritarianism hardens into permanence. With control of the House and a sympathetic Supreme Court, the President has been able to push laws and influence decisions with alarming ease. That bias must be challenged. So the answer to "When?" was simple: now.

Where?

Anywhere and everywhere. Major demonstrations in cities across the country, yes—but also state and local actions. Change doesn't happen only on national stages.

Why?

To prevent our constitutional system from being hollowed out. To protect my rights. To resist the erosion of democratic norms.

How?

*

I devised a three-pronged plan:

1. Join protests and marches, but also take additional steps to pressure the administration to restore my civil rights and stop enacting religion-based laws.
2. Become a spokesperson. Seek media attention. Spread the word about the denial of DEI rights. Record lectures, offer online courses, host virtual seminars—interactive ones, with quizzes, simulations, and collaborative learning.
3. *Mobilize students.*
    a. *Start with civic awareness: teach them how government is supposed to work, and how it's being undermined. Inspire them to become activists.*
    b. *Then help them build a digital grassroots movement—using social networks to recruit more activists, share information about attacks on DEI, education, civil rights, and more.*

Students understand social networks instinctively. They know how to reach people. It struck me as almost poetic: during the Vietnam era, student protests helped drive the anti-war movement. Fifty years later, students could once again help correct government overreach.

*

That night, I went to bed thinking about what else I could do. But my mind refused to settle. Instead, it kept generating new ideas — more ways to resist, more ways to organize, more ways to speak out.

If those were dreams, they were the sweetest kind: dreams of action, purpose, and possibility.

Chapter 26: My Refresher Course in Non-Violence

Just as my head hit the pillow, a thought jolted me awake. Somewhere in this house I had a book about resisting totalitarian regimes. I wasn't advocating a revolt — at least not yet — but that book offered insight into what drives dictators and how people can push back. I wanted it. I wanted to understand what we could do to change the President's policy direction.

By 5:00 a.m., I gave up on sleep entirely. I rolled out of bed, wrapped myself in my white terrycloth bathrobe, slid into my pink bunny slippers, caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror—ghastly, I thought—and padded downstairs to hunt for the book. If it wasn't in my home bookcase, I'd search my office next.

A quick Internet search reminded me of the title: "*From Dictatorship to Democracy*," by Professor Gene Sharp. His work is famous for outlining how ordinary people can resist authoritarianism. It's a slim volume — five by seven inches, maybe 150 pages at most — designed to be tucked into pockets by protestors facing their own demon dictators. In at least one country, simply possessing it was punishable by 7 years in prison.

I remembered, too, that Sharp's ideas had helped topple authoritarian governments in Indonesia, Burma, Serbia, Egypt—just to name a few.

*

And then, finally, there it was: bottom shelf, far right, the last possible place it could hide. As a bonus, sitting right beside it was my copy of Sun Tzu's "*The Art of War*." That, too, might offer some strategic wisdom.

Since I was already downstairs, I brewed a pot of coffee, carried both books back to bed, stretched out, and began rereading. I needed a refresher.

Sharp's From Dictatorship to Democracy is a masterclass in resisting authoritarianism, fascism, and tyranny. He spent his entire career documenting how nonviolent action can pry dictators loose from power. His work guided past revolutions and continues to shape movements today.

The most important lesson? Dictators depend on your inaction. They rely on fear, apathy, and the tacit consent of the governed. If people stay silent, dictators operate freely. But when people begin to disobey—strategically, collectively—the authoritarian façade starts to crack.

Sharp argues that to resist effectively, you must understand a dictator's weaknesses. On page 39, he lists several vulnerabilities, all tied to the dictator's need to maintain uninterrupted control:

- They need the cooperation of the populace. Withdraw that cooperation, and the machinery of governance grinds down.
- They need accurate information. Sycophants often lie to keep the leader happy—an Achilles' heel that feels uncomfortably familiar.
- They need ideological coherence. When a dictator prioritizes ideology above reality, they lose touch with the conditions their people face. (Hello, French Revolution. And perhaps a bit of déjà vu here at home.)

Sharp's central point is clear: you must get involved. Nonviolent resistance works because it exploits these vulnerabilities. Dictators enforce obedience; strategic disobedience disrupts their power.

He also warns against violence. Oppressors almost always have superior force. Violence is their terrain, and you're likely to lose.

One final gem: the Appendix, pages 124–135, lists 198 methods of nonviolent action. One hundred ninety-eight ways to undermine a dictator. Food for thought...

*

Sun Tzu, writing more than 2,500 years ago, wasn't thinking about modern dictators, but his strategic insights still resonate. *The Art of War* is a study of vulnerabilities, misdirection, and the psychology of power. While it doesn't explicitly address authoritarianism, one quote leapt out at me:

"A leader leads by example, not by force."

Chapter 27: Movement Alignment

Now that I had searched my soul and clarified why I needed to protest, the next step was figuring out who I should stand with. Two organizations immediately came to mind: the *No Kings Movement* and the *50:50:1 Movement*, better known as *50501*.

As a political science professor, both groups had been on my radar for months, but the chaos of the administration's first hundred days had consumed so much of my attention that I'd barely registered their activities. I knew 50501 had started on *Reddit* and that a few of their rallies had already taken place. As for the No Kings Movement, I knew even less. In hindsight, I suspect that was by design — POTUS's constant stream of stories, scandals, and distractions kept the public's eyes darting from one shiny object to the next. It was easy to miss the quiet rise of organized resistance.

That ignorance was about to end.

*

I started with the No Kings Movement's website. The moment the page loaded, their manifesto filled the screen:

- We Stand Against Unchecked Power
- We Defend Democracy
- We Reject Billionaire Control
- We Hold Leaders Accountable
- We Take Action
- We Will Not Be Silenced
- No Kings. No Rulers. Just Democracy.

I found their principles inspiring. Still, I couldn't help thinking they needed one more: We stand against the denial of DEI civil rights. Even so, I felt aligned with their mission. The question was how to get involved.

*

Fortunately, the site included a link to the No Kings Nationwide Day of Defiance, a coordinated series of protests scheduled for June 14th — perfect timing, since classes would be over by then. Hundreds of cities were already on the list. Bangor or Portland were possibilities, but I also wondered whether I could help organize something on the College campus in Bangor.

A little digging revealed that the closest confirmed event was in Freeport, about 125 miles away. My first thought was to organize a bus for College of Maine students. That would require university approval, collecting funds for transportation, and rallying student interest. All doable — but not immediately. First, I needed to talk with a few of my students and gauge their enthusiasm.

What impressed me most was how organized these protests were. Activist groups had already coordinated more than 650 events nationwide, with more being added every week.

*

Next, I turned to the 50501 Movement — "50 protests, 50 states, one movement." They were closely aligned with No Kings but had a slightly different emphasis. No Kings focused on grassroots organizing and constitutional advocacy; 50501 leaned into nationwide mobilization and coordinated political action. I planned to attend events from both.

On their site, I found the next Maine event: the *Maine D-Day Rally* in Augusta on Friday, June 6, 2025. The rally would honor the legacy of D-Day while calling for the defense of democracy. Augusta was only seventy-five miles from Bangor — an easy trip. I wondered whether my reporter friend, Alex Monroe, would be there covering it.

I decided then and there that I would attend.

*

For my primary issue — DEI civil rights — 50501 seemed the better fit. They explicitly supported reinstating federal DEI policies, protecting minority and LGBTQ rights, and reversing recent revocations. Their site even listed DEI-focused events, including a booth at a *Pride Day* protest in Norwalk, Connecticut.

To be fair, the No Kings Movement also emphasized civil rights and opposition to authoritarian policies; DEI simply wasn't one of their core slogans. But the overlap was strong enough that I felt comfortable supporting both.

Overall, I was thrilled to see how well-organized these anti-POTUS groups were — their digital outreach, their coordination, their ability to draw new participants. I could easily pledge allegiance to either.

*

Now that I understood my motivations and had chosen the organizations I wanted to align with, it was time to talk with Mary—and hopefully convince her to join me.

Did our past conversations about the administration's agenda, or our debate about trans girls in sports, influence my decision to become an activist? Absolutely. And did our recent discussion about the origins of hate push me further? Without question.

The only remaining question was whether Mary would walk this path with me. When I ask her, I hope she says yes.

Chapter 28: Convincing Mary

When the school year ends, Mary plans to venture up to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to conduct some Canadian historical research. Two of her girlfriends also planned to make the trip, though neither had a particular interest in history – they just wanted to go along for the ride, for the adventure of visiting new places.

The highlight of her trip, she believed, would be the furthest point away from Bangor, the *L'Anse aux Meadows* in Newfoundland, which is considered to be the site of the first European settlement in North America. It was thought to have been inhabited by Norse sailors about a thousand years ago. The drive from Bangor, Maine to *L'Anse aux Meadows*, she calculated, would be about 1,130 miles, and takes around 19 hours and 45 minutes to get there, not counting the ferry trip, which can add about 6-7 hours if you leave from North Sydney, Nova Scotia, to Port aux Basques, Newfoundland. Or even longer if you take the seasonal ferry to Argentia, adding 14-16 hours to the trip.

As she made her way back to Bangor, she planned to see the Cape Spear Lighthouse in Newfoundland, hike a few National Park trails, and then head back to Nova Scotia to drive the wild and woolly *Cabot Trail*. She would make her way to Halifax, with stops at the "*Highland Village Museum*," which is an outdoor living history museum that highlights Gaelic culture, as well as at a few sites of historical significance. She also planned to make a few stops in New Brunswick, including a visit to the capital in Fredericton, before returning.

So, the big question on the table was: "*How was I going to convince Mary to abandon her Canadian trip and join me in the protest marches and rallies*?"

*

We had decided to "do" coffee on the day after I had made my decision to become an activist. I was waiting at a table for Mary's arrival, and, as usual, she made quite an appearance. She was wearing a black dress, cut just below the knees, and a cable-knit black Cardigan. She looked beautiful, classy, and elegant. But, as

is her comical nature, she was wearing green duck boots — hardly a match for the rest of her attire. I would call that look "*improperly accessorized*." Still, her outfit, in my opinion, was stylish, practical and whimsical. It put a smile on my face.

I waved, and we both got coffee and returned to my table.

*

Mary had mentioned that it was "student conference time," that time of the year when students and faculty review class progress and get to know each other a little better.

"So, how are the student conferences going?" I opened as we sat down for coffee at the *Hilltopper Dining Hall*, one of the College's cafeterias.

"They're going," she smiled and nodded. She really enjoys the one-on-one sessions with her students. "And you?" she asked.

"I haven't started the conferences yet; I've been busy planning my summer break," I told my half-truth.

"So where are you planning to go, Olivia?" she asked, knowing that I usually seek out seminars, or I find interesting lectures to attend at various colleges and universities, or I visit some of my Poly-Sci buddies in other locations.

"This year I'll be spending some time travelling from city to city," I answered vaguely and switched the focus back to her trip. "Still heading up to *L'Anse aux Meadows* with your girlfriends?" Her answer surprised me.

"Well, the girls are pushing back. They think the trip is too long and too time-consuming. They don't want to be away from their husbands, and out of touch with their children for three weeks, which is how long I planned to be away."

"Oh, that's a shame," I replied sympathetically, not meaning it. It presented a potential opportunity for me.

"They want to shorten the trip, scale it back a bit. Maybe just do Nova Scotia. But I've already been to Nova Scotia, I was doing that segment of the trip for them," she lamented. "So, right now I'm looking into a flight, just for me, to L'Anse au Meadows. I

can fly out of either Fredericton or Halifax to St. Anthony Airport or Deer Lake Airport in Newfoundland. It costs less than five hundred dollars, which, considering the ferry cost and the gas money, is definitely cheaper and far less time-consuming."

"So, when are you going to make your decision on the trip with the girls, or the independent trip?"

"I pretty much already have. It'll be the independent trip."

That was the answer I was hoping for.

"So, I've got an idea..."

*

I could offer to go to Newfoundland with her, and I hope for a quid pro quo – that she would accompany me to the *No Kings* event to protest current administration policies.

But how was I going to broach this topic? Should I point out that, with the icy relationship between the U.S. and Canada due to the POTUS tariffs, now might not be the best time to visit Canada? I decided that wouldn't work. The Canadians that I know are all very polite people, even if they don't like your politics, so I knew Mary would not be the recipient of any POTUS backlash should she continue with her plans to visit Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

Instead, I decided to kind of bait Mary into joining me in Washington. I had written out my "*Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How*" answers on my computer and printed them. I handed the printout to Mary.

"What's this?" Mary asked quizzically. She'd seen me do this "*Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How*" thing before. She found that approach to be novel.

"This is how I plan to spend my summer," I stated in a firm, committed, declarative voice. I wanted to make it sound important and noble.

Mary gave me the once-over to see if I was serious; decided I was; and kept reading.

"So, you are planning to focus on DEI protests?"

I affirmed.

"And you intend to hop on this bandwagon immediately," she asked.

"Immediately, if not sooner," I replied, letting her know that I thought that immediacy was important.

She kept reading.

"And, additionally, for the remainder of the school year, you're planning to work 'reasons to protest' into your lesson plans and lectures?'

"That's the plan."

Mary thought about my plan. She thought about her new travel options. Without having to go to Newfoundland and then all-around Nova Scotia, she would have two extra, open weeks on her calendar. Plus, the No Kings and 50:50:1 marches would make history. She couldn't "*not go*."

"Can I come?" she smiled. "I want to protest, too."

"You bet you can!" I replied, pleased as punch that I'd have my best friend along to join me!

*

Next, Mary turned her attention to the "*teach students by working 'reasons to protest' into my lecture's* intention.

"I like all of what you've stated here, except for the working of reasons to protest into your lectures. You have to be very careful there. You know how students on the right get upset if you appear too liberal." She paused, "You *and I* are going to have to be very subtle as we give our students reasons to object to the behavior of the current administration."

She snuck it in. "You *and I* are going to have to be careful..." Mary and I were both going to modify our courses to incorporate new discussions. Mine would have to focus more on the violation of constitutional rights through Executive Orders. And Mary's would have to examine historical presidential behaviors that mirror today's administration.

"Agreed, I answered. "Do you want to talk about this over dinner tonight?"

"Deal," she answered. I think she was pretty pleased that she had just committed to participating in protest marches and rallies. It filled the gap in her summer plans, plus it gave her a new *raison d'être*. She, too, was now an *activist*!

Chapter 29: Modifying Our Lectures

We kept dinner simple that night — Mary's special spaghetti sauce and my favorite salad. I tossed olives and cheddar cheese into a bowl and dressed my salad with Ken's Steakhouse dressing, while Mary worked her magic at the stove. Her sauce was a ritual: crushed tomatoes, a drizzle of olive oil, fresh basil and thyme, and her secret flourish — a generous pour of red wine, stirred in and left to simmer until the whole kitchen smelled warm and rich.

She served the pasta, we grabbed our notepads, and the "working" part of our working dinner began.

*

Our mission was straightforward but delicate: raise student awareness about the administration's actions without crossing the line into partisanship. We disliked the administration's direction, yes—but in the classroom, we had to be educators first.

"We have to stay unbiased," Mary insisted. "Present facts, interpret them responsibly, and let the students decide what to do with that information."

I nodded. "So how do we teach them what all these government maneuvers actually mean?"

Mary tapped her pen thoughtfully. "We could structure our classes around interpreting current events. Executive orders, press freedom issues, academic freedom challenges, potential corruption — there's plenty to analyze."

"It's a great idea," I said. "But we'll have to tread carefully. One accusation of bias and we're sunk."

*

I circled back to our broader goal. "We need students involved—really involved. During Vietnam, campuses were the heart of the protest movement. Teach-ins, draft resistance, demonstrations... activism spread like wildfire. We need that kind of energy again."

Mary leaned back, thinking. "And we'll need more than students. Back then, the movement included intellectuals, veterans,

religious leaders, Black activists, celebrities. A whole coalition. If we want real momentum, we need broad appeal."

"We're not starting from scratch," I reminded her. "Major activist groups are already mobilizing. Our contribution is to bring our own people — our students — to swell the numbers and amplify the pressure."

"So," she asked, "What do we change in our lessons to draw students into the movement?"

"For me, it's easy," I said. "I'm teaching Constitutional Law. All I have to do is introduce how the administration's executive orders interact with constitutional principles."

"That's practically everything they're doing," Mary quipped.

I ignored the jab. "Seriously — if I walk them through how executive orders work, how courts review them, and how constitutional limits function, they'll start connecting the dots themselves."

"So, tomorrow's class becomes a case study in executive power?" she asked.

"Exactly. Minimal prep. Maximum impact."

Mary smirked. "Alright then. Let's see how your little experiment goes."

*

Now it was her turn.

"I've got HTY 103 and 104," she said. "Early America and modern America. I can weave protest history into both."

She warmed to the idea quickly. "We've been here before. Before the Revolution, colonists protested unfair British taxes. *The Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, the Boston Tea Party* — citizen-led resistance to government overreach."

"True," I said, "though those protests didn't exactly change British policy. *The Sons of Liberty* got loud—and sometimes violent."

Mary's eyes lit up. "But the key word is liberty. That's what we're fighting for now. We can frame our message as a continuation of that tradition—patriots defending their rights."

I liked the framing. It was subtle, historical, and powerful.

She continued, "Every one of those protests was about reclaiming autonomy. We can show students that protest is woven into American identity."

"So, your angle is: we've protested before, and it's time again?"

"Yes," she said. "But gently."

*

I knew her schedule well. "What about your *Modern American Capitalism* course? Can you work something in there?"

She raised an eyebrow. "What are you thinking?"

"Your course covers labor, the factory system, and public policy. That includes workplace laws — ethnicity, race, gender. You could discuss how policy shifts affect labor markets."

"So, you're suggesting that I use DEI policy changes as a case study?"

"Exactly. And tariffs too. Tariffs are economic policy. You could do a whole lecture on how tariffs shape capitalist development."

Mary nodded slowly. "I like it. I can use *reciprocity* to explain trade systems, then bring in historical examples — *Smoot-Hawley*, for instance. Then let students draw their own conclusions about current tariff strategies."

She paused, thinking it through. "And it doesn't have to be negative. I can say: 'Here's how Monroe handled trade. Here's how Hoover handled tariffs. Here's how the current administration is approaching it. What do you predict?' It becomes a learning exercise, not a political sermon."

"I love it," I said. "We don't have to tell them what to think. Just show them patterns. Roosevelt used executive orders. Clinton used them. Biden used them. Now this President uses them. Students can decide what they make of it."

Mary added, “I could even do a class on administrative corruption — Andrew Jackson is a perfect example. Populism and corruption often go hand-in-hand.”

“And I can show how leaders in other countries manipulated their constitutions,” I said. “Comparative politics at its finest.”

We kept brainstorming, tossing ideas back and forth, building a curriculum that would help students understand the present moment through the lens of history, law, and political structure.

“We’ll have to be careful,” Mary cautioned again. “With the polarization today, someone will get offended.”

I shrugged. “If we don’t do this, we’re not doing our jobs.”

Chapter 30: Our Counter-Blueprint

Dinner the next night was Chicken with Rosemary Wine Sauce—Mary's specialty. I brought the chicken thighs; she had everything else. The kitchen filled with the scent of butter, rosemary, and simmering wine as she worked, humming lightly, completely in her element. We'd already had a couple glasses of wine before dinner, so by the time we sat down, we were mellow, warm, and talkative, savoring the last of the bottle as we ate.

*

After dinner, I reached into my bag and pulled out the Sharp book.

"Mary, you've got to see this," I said. "We already know all about the Republicans' *2025 Mandate for Leadership*, right?"

She nodded.

"Well, guess what." I slid the book across the table. "We now have our own blueprint for how to protest the illegal actions of our government."

The look she gave me was priceless — somewhere between *What on earth is she talking about* and *What bombshell is she about to drop*.

I handed her the book. "Professor Gene Sharp. American political scientist. Spent his entire career studying nonviolent resistance. This whole book is about how to challenge oppression without violence."

Then I added, "He passed away in 2018, but his work is still shaping movements around the world."

*

Mary found the *Table of Contents* in a heartbeat. Her brows knit together, then lifted as she read. The chapter titles alone were enough to hook her:

- Facing Dictatorships Realistically
- The Dangers of Negotiations
- Whence Comes the Power?
- Dictatorships Have Weaknesses
- Exercising Power
- The Need for Strategic Planning
- Planning Strategy
- Applying Political Defiance
- Disintegrating the Dictatorship
- Groundwork for Durable Democracy

She was fascinated — I could see it in the way she leaned in, flipping pages faster, scanning, absorbing. God, I love watching her mind catch fire like that.

After ten minutes of rapid exploration, she closed the book and delivered her verdict:

"This is a manual for dismantling authoritarian regimes through strategic nonviolent resistance. It argues that dictatorships aren't invincible — they depend on obedience, and that obedience can be withdrawn."

She got all that in ten minutes. And she was absolutely right.

"Yes," I said. "Dictatorships have weaknesses. Internal power struggles. Ideological contradictions—Lenin versus Stalin, for example. And most importantly, they rely on public cooperation. When people withdraw that cooperation, things change. Think of the *Civil Rights Movement*. The *Vietnam protests*. The *Arab Spring*."

"This is unbelievable," Mary said. "This is how we'll beat POTUS."

Again, she wasn't wrong.

"But the best part," I said, "is the addendum. One hundred ninety-eight nonviolent methods of resistance. One hundred ninety-eight ways to push back."

She flipped to the back, scanned the list, then looked up. "Can I borrow this tonight?"

"Of course. Come to my place tomorrow for dinner and we'll dig into it."

"Deal," she said, energized now, already strategizing. "Sometimes you Poli Sci professors are just amazing."

I grinned. "We aim to please."

*

Back at my apartment, my imagination ran wild. I pictured POTUS as a full-fledged dictator, marching down the same path others had taken — consolidating power, bending the judiciary, testing the limits of the law just to see what he could get away with. When caught, he did one of three things: ignored the courts, withdrew if the issue wasn't useful to him, or appealed until he reached the Supreme Court.

With the House and Senate in his pocket, legislation was whatever he wanted it to be. A handful of Senators might push back but deals always got made. And once Congress was neutralized, the next target was the legal system. With a Supreme Court largely appointed by him, the guardrails of democracy were already buckling.

Then came the agencies — oversight gutted, whistle-blowers silenced. And finally, the people. Retribution for anyone who crossed him. A warning shot to everyone else: misbehave by MAGA standards, and you could be next.

The only missing piece was violence. If he ever used executive power to deploy the military against civilians — and if he succeeded in pushing past public resistance — then democracy would be gone. At that point, we'd be living under a dictatorship.

Chapter 31: Girls Night Out

It had been a while since my girlfriends and I got together, so when Olivia and Alex decided to do a "brewery tour," I decided to get together with my friends Melissa, Amy, and Cheryl to have a "*Girls Night Out*." We had all met at the College of Maine as undergrads, and all of us, for some strange reason, decided to settle in the Bangor area.

For those unfamiliar with Bangor, it is a city of approximately 33,000 people, making it the third-largest city in Maine. When we graduated in 2003, Bangor was a little grungy, a little run-down. There were a few clubs that stayed open late; there were a few shops worth visiting; there was, and still is, a sound hospital system in town. But, in general, Bangor was nondescript.

The city started to change around 2018. More shops moved in to take advantage of the available empty space. The population was growing; consequently, there were more prospective customers, which led to the opening of new restaurants.

Of all the shops in downtown Bangor, my favorite shop is the *Antique Marketplace*. It features two floors and boasts over 50 independent sellers, each with a booth offering a diverse selection of antiques, books, artwork, jewelry, and even vinyl records. It's where I buy most of the stuff for my apartment.

Due to COVID-19, several local restaurants went out of business; however, they were replaced by about half a dozen new restaurants. Additionally, several new breweries have joined the restaurant and bar scene. We now have seven breweries, with two of my favorites, the *Sea Dog* and *Mason's*, located on the Penobscot River. None of us girls drink beer, but the *Sea Dog* accommodates us wine drinkers with a wide selection of wines, including Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Prosecco, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc. We mostly go there because it's easy to park nearby, and we like the view and ambiance.

I'm the odd-man-out, so to speak, at these gatherings because all of my friends are mothers. I never had children. My friends have weathered their diaper-changing years, their children's adolescent years, and now their kids are all grown up and off to college.

I think Cheryl and Melissa are somewhat lost because their children are no longer under their care, and they no longer have as many domestic duties, nor the responsibilities of counseling and guidance to perform. Amy, on the other hand, is a dynamo – she always has something going on, whether it's a charity event, a church event, a family event, a theatrical event, and so on. What we all have in common, I've decided, is our long histories together – we know all about the challenges and travails we have collectively faced over the years, and we've all survived those challenges. We've got each other's backs.

All three of my friends claim to be happily married. But I think all three are somewhat bored with their husbands. After twenty years with their spouses, they crave some adventure, new places to explore, and new experiences; however, from my perspective, their marriages have stagnated. That's why I think they're sort of jealous of me. When school is not in session, I can pick up and go anywhere I want, with whoever I want, and do whatever I want. I think, sometimes, that they live vicariously through me.

Inevitably, at these girls' night outs, the subject turns to my "love life," or lack thereof, as it predictably did tonight.

*

"So," Cheryl asked the inevitable question, "Are you seeing anyone new?"

Amy, being the comedian, rephrased Cheryl's question. "Or should we ask, are you just plain seeing anyone?"

The ladies all chuckled. I smiled, seemingly good-naturedly, but I hated talking about this stuff with them. *No, I'm not,* and *I don't want to talk about this*, is my usual internal reaction.

"Not at the moment," I responded to the ladies' amused giggles.

Have you ever noticed how women eschew a vacuum when it comes to having a friend who is not married, engaged, or in some sort of relationship? Their first reaction when they hear that another woman is single or struggling to find a partner is: "*Who can I set her up with*?" It's like they're always on the lookout for

some single male victim who would make a good match for their friend. *Can't they just leave well enough alone?*

Today, thank God, they proposed zero matches. But I had no doubt they'd be keeping their eyes open for one.

*

The subject eventually turned to my relationship with Olivia. Melissa didn't like that I was seeing so much of a trans-woman. She was religious, and her religion and transsexuals don't mix well.

Cheryl was, I think, fascinated by our relationship. She knew that I liked being with Olivia because we have intellectual discussions, we share insights, and because of the variety of our conversation. We can talk for hours on a plethora of subjects. She understood what she terms our "*intellectual relationship*."

Amy, being Amy, asked: "So if good ole' Olivia doesn't use his thing with you, what do you do for sex?" Cheryl immediately scolded Amy. Melissa looked surprised, inquisitive, then bemused.

Again, this line of questioning is a little too close to my comfort zone, in fact, way too personal. But I knew if I didn't give them a crisp, straightforward answer, they'd keep probing. So, I said: "I just forgo it."

Wrong answer. That set off a string of questions about my need for intimacy, don't I miss sex, don't I want a close companion to come home to every night and snuggle up with? *No, I don't, thank you.* I thought.

The answer lay in that final question. I said: "No, I don't want to come home every night to the same person. I like my space. And that's why Olivia and my relationship works out so well. She's not underfoot, but she's there when I need her for conversation, we regularly enjoy meals together, and we love to swap ideas. And she's not there every night, so I don't have her underfoot all of the time."

They got lost for a second when I referred to Olivia as "she," but they quickly corrected that confusion and understood that I was referring to Olivia by her preferred gender.

I paused. They were still wondering if Olivia "fulfilled" me.

I continued: "I enjoy having the freedom to do what I want, when I want. Plus, I don't have to clean up around the toilet!"

That worked; it got a good chuckle, and it stopped their prying. We moved on to other topics.

*

As I worked my way home that evening, I wondered if they could tell how truly lonely I really am.

My reticence to establish another relationship with a man can be directly tied to my experience with my former husband. He was the man that I trusted with my love, the man whom I thought I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. And then the beating started.

The last time I saw him was when I was being taken in an ambulance to the hospital. Turns out I had a broken collarbone, and contusions and bruises all over my face and body. Never again, I swore. But he saved me the trouble of getting a divorce; he overdosed before the police arrived to arrest him for abuse.

And since then, I have not wanted male company in my life. I'm comfortable with Olivia; she suits me just fine.

Or does she?

Chapter 32: Recap

After we had both had our "nights out," Mary came over to visit me the next day. She looked tired, as if she hadn't slept all night. I attributed it to too much partying and let it go. Truth is, though, she hadn't slept all night. She just tossed and turned, fretting. Unbeknownst to me, she was feeling lonely, as if a void existed in her life, as if something was missing. I completely missed her signs of anxiety and apprehension. She was good at hiding her feelings and emotions, but I should have been more sensitive to them. I should have been more attentive to my best friend.

*

Mary turned the conversation back to me, pressing for details about my get-together with Alex. I started by telling her about the impression I always make when I'm seen in public with Alex. "Have you ever seen an old man walking along the street with his dog, and you go: 'Aw, isn't that cute, an old man and his best companion?"

"Of course," Mary nodded. "It is cute," she admitted.

"Well, it's kind of the same when Alex and I get together. People look at this old hag, me, and they look at young, handsome Alex — and they think: 'Isn't that cute, that son is taking his mother out for an afternoon at the sports bar.'"

Mary got a good chuckle out of that one. She could definitely envision that piteous scenario.

"We also talked a little about his love life," I intimated. "As he puts it: 'I've been through a couple of relationships over the past few years, and they have all crashed-and-burned. So now, I'm avoiding romantic relationships."

This is a little close to home. The girls had asked Mary the same kind of questions that same night. But she didn't tell me that she didn't want to talk about relationships.

I, obviously, continued: "But I think what is going on is that Alex sabotages his relationship. I think he starts off having a good time with his ladies, but he reacts badly when they try to control him

and start demanding more of his attention. Alex hates, with a passion, being controlled."

Who doesn't? Mary thought.

"It's best to let a man just do what he wants, as long as you're regularly included in his activities," Mary observed. "That's how I'd handle it; give him the space that he needs as long as he regularly includes me."

"Yes, but that's just it. Alex works long, hard hours, and often travels. So, his girlfriends start demanding more of his attention – and the next thing you know, they're hitting the pavement."

Mary nodded; she fully understood what was going on. "So, he's using work as a defense mechanism, so he doesn't have to commit to the relationships."

"Precisely," I confirmed. "He's using work as a means to deny attention. He sabotages his relationships." I paused and reflected: "So, how do you correct that situation?"

Mary considered that question for a few moments and replied: "You know, Olivia, I think it's all about 'trust.' It sounds like his women don't trust that he has their best interests in mind. So they try to control him. And he doesn't like that, so he drives his relationships off the rails."

I agreed completely, and we proceeded to the following conversation.

*

"So, anyway," I continued, "Alex and I talked about what our future plans were. And we spent a lot of time on what mine were going to be. And that led to the topic of the night: my growing desire to start a social media campaign against all this Title IX/anti-LGBTQ+ stuff that the government is pulling."

"And how did he react to that?"

"He's all for it. He'll increase the number of interviews he does with me, and he's hooking me up with other people in government who might help me promote my cause."

"Outstanding!" Mary congratulated me. And then she changed to topic to something that had been on her mind regarding our protest plans.

"I have to ask you this," Mary started, "Have you considered the repercussions of your plan. This government is known for its reprisals. You could get in big trouble."

I answered: "I'm trans. In this new environment, I am already a target — a minority. Would I become more of a target if I fought back against government tyranny? Maybe. Maybe not. So, I thought to myself: 'Screw it, I'm going to do this anyway.'"

*

I was well aware that this current administration is becoming known for "*going after*" people. POTUS himself has also made statements about targeting adversaries through legal actions. And he has expressed interest in using the *Justice Department* to bully his detractors. To wit:

- Chris Krebs, the former director of the *Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency* (CISA), was investigated after affirming that the 2020 election was secure. He was accused of falsely denying election fraud, and his cybersecurity business was investigated.
- Miles Taylor, a former *Homeland Security* official, described internal resistance to POTUS policies, and POTUS accused him of treason.
- Former FBI director James Comey has found himself "under investigation" multiple times since POTUS has been in office. He documented and shared memos describing his interactions with POTUS – apparently, that is a big no-no. He posted a shot of some seashells on a beach that had been arranged to form "8647." The POTUS maniacs claimed that that post was a call to eliminate the President of the United States. I give them points for "very creative thinking."

There are rumors that the current administration is keeping "enemy lists" of dissenters, including people who were formerly in politics who have spoken out against POTUS, as well as a secret list of people in the entertainment business, that might include Bruce Springsteen, Taylor Swift, as well as news personnel who have spoken out against POTUS and his administration.

Secret lists scare me. I think of them as *reprisal lists* with some surprise vindictive events related to payback lurking in the background.

So, yes, it's right to be scared of this government. But it's even more right to protest its anti-constitutional behavior.

Chapter 33: What Are "Executive Orders?"

I would be the guinea pig for our new, protest-infused lectures. We intended to provide our students with constitutional and historical information that would enable them to put the government's actions into legal and historical context. Mary and I had agreed to be careful and limit our biases. A line from the old TV police drama kept coming to my mind: *Just the facts, ma'am.*"

The first topic that I chose to focus on in my *Constitutional Law* course was the constitutional use of *Executive Orders*. It was now April, so I was certain that my students had a good grasp of the *Articles of the Constitution*, how policies are made, and what *Executive Orders* are.

*

I opened my Executive Orders class by reading the preamble to the Constitution.

> *"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."*

"Now, you're all familiar with the U.S. Constitution. Can anyone here tell me where in the *Constitution* it is written that a president can use his executive powers to issue *Executive Orders* in order to modify policies or create new ones?" I asked.

I looked around the room. My teacher's pet, Tito, looked pensive. My provocateur, Lucas Johnson, looked lost and confused. Even the POTUS apologist Sagadahoc Jane remained silent.

I waited, then smiled. "Of course you can't, because there is no explicit permission for the issuance of Executive Orders to be found in the U.S. Constitution. Article II grants the president 'executive power,' but it does not specifically give the president the power to issue Executive Orders." I paused to let that sink in, then continued.

"Has anyone ever heard of the '*Take Care*' clause?" I asked, fully expecting more blank looks, which I did receive. "The '*Take Care*' clause is contained in Article II, Section 3, and it advises that a president must 'take care that laws are faithfully executed. And that, my dear friends, is the basis of the Executive Order. That one line: '*take care that laws are faithfully executed*' is what gives a president the authority to issue orders in order to execute the laws of the land faithfully."

"Additionally, you should know that the president's role as *Commander-in-Chief* under Article II, Section 2 also provides further authority, particularly in military and national security matters. So, if you can justify that you are experiencing a threat to national security, you can issue an executive order to deal with it."

Sniffling little Sagadahoc Jane looked intrigued. You could almost hear her think: "Oh, that's how he does it. He declares an emergency and then issues orders accordingly..."

I could tell the rest of the class was highly interested in the direction I was taking our discussion. But I had to be careful – some might interpret my prelude as an opening salvo for an attack on the current POTUS. I did not want my class to become "partisan divisive," so I flashed a slide on the classroom digital screen to take them in a new direction.

"So, today we're going to discuss the use of the Executive Order by presidents past and present to use the Constitution to drive their policy initiatives. We're going to consider how Abraham Lincoln used his Commander-in-Chief role to issue an executive order to suspend habeas corpus. This law would have prevented people from being detained illegally during the Civil War. Was that an overreach of the Constitution?"

The next point on the slide read: "*Franklin D. Roosevelt issued numerous Executive Orders during his New Deal that significantly expanded federal authority.*" Is that what we're experiencing today?

The next point on the slide read: "*Bill Clinton used Executive Orders to override measures that Congress had rejected.*" I added: "Mr. Clinton's orders were challenged in the courts on

several occasions, as overriding Congress is considered to be a violation of the Constitution."

The next point was that both Joe Biden and the current President of the United States (POTUS) have used executive orders to reverse the policies of previous administrations. This point struck particularly close to home because it was precisely what the current President is doing to override the Biden-era Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion protections that we, as a country, had enjoyed since the 1970s, long before Biden assumed the presidency.

I could have included a review of the Obama and Bush Executive Orders, but I knew I'd be pressed for time, so I chose not to. The class continued on this topic for another fifteen minutes. The students were on the edges of their seats. They were enjoying this class!

*

Eventually, I changed the subject. "We've discussed Habeas Corpus before; can anybody refresh my memory and tell me what it means?"

Three hands shot up, and I chose the closest. He was an older fellow from Portland by the name of "Chummy" Wilson. "It is a legal principle that protects individuals from unlawful detention. The term comes from Latin, meaning "you shall have the body," and it ensures that a person who is arrested or imprisoned has the right to be brought before a court to determine whether their detention is lawful."

"Correctomundo," I affirmed.

I flashed my next slide on the digital screen.

"Can anybody tell me what this is?" I asked as the class examined the document on display.

October 14, 1861

Lieutenant-General WINFIELD SCOTT:

The military line of the United States for the suppression of the insurrection may be extended so far as Bangor, in Maine. You and any officer acting under your authority are hereby authorized to suspend the writ of habeas corpus in any place between that place and the city of Washington.

_____ ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

By the President:

_____WILLIAM H. SEWARD,

Secretary of State

Sagadahoc Jane looked confused, so, of course, I called upon her. "Miss Jane, would you care to venture a guess?"

She was a bit flustered that I had called upon her, but her answer was swift. "It appears to be a memo from President Abraham Lincoln to Secretary of State William H. Seward telling him to suspend habeas corpus from Bangor down to Washington, D.C."

"Is it telling him to suspend habeas corpus, or ordering him to?"

She looked more closely. "Ordering him to."

"Making it?" I prodded.

She smiled. She got the message. "Making it an *Executive Order*!"

"Spot on, Miss Jane. An executive order can be this simple, like a memorandum. However, Executive Orders can also be several pages long and are often considered legal documents. The key is that they are directives from a president, thus presidential orders."

"And why is this relevant today?" I asked the class, but Jane failed to give up the hot seat.

"It's relevant because our current president is considering suspending habeas corpus for the immigrants who have illegally entered our country," she said.

"And how did Lincoln get away with issuing such an order?" I asked. Jane looked confused again.

Lucas Johnson spoke up: "He must have used his Commander-in-Chief role to issue this order as a matter of national security. After all, the country was in the midst of the Civil War."

I finished Lucas's thought: "And Lincoln feared insurrection in the geography outlined. That's how it was justified."

I was pleased. The class understood that there were two means to issue executive orders, and Lucas figured out the means that justified Lincoln's executive order. They also understood that POTUS was considering suspending the writ of habeas corpus because we had been "invaded" by illegal immigrants. Lesson learned. Mission accomplished.

*

I put my bullet slide back up on the digital screen and pointed to the second bullet point: "*Franklin D. Roosevelt issued numerous Executive Orders during his New Deal that significantly expanded federal authority.*"

"In this case, FDR used the 'take care' clause to justify his actions." I moved to my next slide.

"In his first one hundred days in office, FDR signed ninety-nine executive orders. And look what he accomplished in his first hundred days in office."

During the first hundred days of the new administration, the legislative branch implemented strict new measures to regulate the securities business. He passed a bill to reorganize railroads. He got American farmers and homeowners the loans they needed to keep their properties. He also created "job programs" to put the unemployed to work. In chronological order, in FDR's first hundred days in office, which ended in early June, he and his team introduced the following:

- On March 16, 1933, the *Agricultural Adjustment Act* was put before Congress. It called for subsidies to farmers who did not plant certain crops, and these subsidies would reduce surpluses. The money for

the subsidies would be derived from a "processing tax" paid by food processors, such as flour millers. Roosevelt's constitutional lawyers indicated that the legality of such attacks might be challenged later, but in the short term, the plan would offer badly needed relief to the farming community. The bill passed.

- On March 21, the bill forming the *Civilian Conservation Corps* was submitted to Congress, creating a work relief program for America's youth.
- On March 27, George's suggested bill to ease farmers' credit was submitted to Congress. It established the Farm Credit Administration, an organization responsible for handling farm credit. The bill also called for combining half a dozen other agencies into one that would ease rates and simplify the loan process.
- On March 29th, a bill that enabled the *Federal Trade Commission* to halt the sale of misrepresented securities was submitted.
- On April 10, the government officially took control of the dam at Muscle Shoals. An ownership dispute between public and private power advocates had erupted after the dam and had gone unresolved for years. The *Tennessee Valley Authority Act* settled the ownership once and for all. The federal government would control the dam and the surrounding area, and would also take over control of future large dam projects. The act also called for regional conservation as well as economic development in the Tennessee Valley.
- On April 13th, the *Home Owners Loan Act* was submitted to Congress. This act offered relief to homeowners, forestalling foreclosures and halting evictions as homeowners refinanced.
- On April 19th, the President submitted a bill to abandon the gold standard. He had previously

issued an executive order to do so, but now followed up with a bill asking Congress to make it the ongoing law of the land.

- On May 4, a bill was submitted to reorganize railroads – an attempt to build a coordinated rail system.
- On May 12th, Congress passed the *Federal Emergency Relief Act,* forming an organization that would provide federal government loans and grants to states to create projects and jobs and distribute relief.
- On May 17, the *National Industrial Recovery Act* was submitted to Congress. This bill would grant the President the authority to manage the nation's business affairs. For instance, it called for the creation of the thirty-hour work week, a minimum wage rate, and other controls. However, it also enabled the creation of the *Public Works Administration* (PWA), an organization that would allocate billions of dollars for large-scale construction projects.
- Also, on May 17, members of Congress submitted the *Glass-Steagall Banking Act.* Congress had considered this act for some time, but now, with all the New Deal activity underway, the bill's authors decided that the time was right to attempt to pass their bill. The bill called for banks to exit the investment business, as well as requiring them to hold a certain amount of deposits.
- Finally, on May 26, the administration submitted a bill to eliminate gold contract clauses. Some businesses had begun requiring payment for their services and gold, thereby undermining the currency. This bill put another stake in the heart of gold ownership.

These examples demonstrate how the system is designed to operate. In some cases, executive orders were issued to expedite the process; in other cases, bills were submitted to Congress for legislative action. FDR's programs revived the country's confidence. People were finding the public relief they needed, the banking system had been repaired, and new government work programs had been established."

I noted that all of FDR's Executive Orders were *constructive;* he addressed problems in banking, farming, housing, stock trading, and the monetary system. He wasn't targeting specific groups of people with divisive, civil-rights-denying Executive Orders.

I also pointed out that the president was urging Congress to allocate the necessary funds to finance his programs. This spending focus, known as counter-cyclical spending, was designed to stimulate the U.S. economy by putting money into the hands of consumers. Those consumers would then start spending money on goods, and the economy would right itself.

"Eventually, Congress grew tired of the President's various projects and formed a coalition called the '*Conservative Coalition*' to rein in the President's spending and regain control over spending. *Question: What are the chances that the same thing could happen again in America?*" I asked. "Another Conservative Coalition?"

That got them thinking about historical precedents, which was my intent.

My forty-five-minute-long constitutional law course drew to a close, right on time, so I adjourned by saying: "Well, that's it for the day, hopefully, you all have a better understanding of what an Executive Order is. The constitutional issue that we will discuss in our next class will be..."

Chapter 34: Forcing Maine to Comply

Teaching that constitutional law class lit a fire under me. I found myself wanting to revisit the current situation with the President's Executive Order more closely — really dissect it, piece by piece.

I started by looking at how many anti-LGBTQ+ orders the President had issued in his first month in office, before his confrontation with Governor Mills. Their clash erupted on February 21st, 2025. By that date, he had already signed one hundred forty-three Executive Orders. One hundred forty-three! His hand must have been exhausted, and his office supply budget probably needed a bailout, because he was burning through ink like it was kerosene.

As I dug deeper, I realized his campaign against the LGBTQ+ community hadn't begun with Maine at all — it had begun on Day One. On January 20th, he signed the "*Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government*" order. I had read it before. It struck me as a document steeped in fear and hostility.

Then came February 2nd and the "*Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports*" order. I've said before that I understand the biological argument — hormones and muscle mass do matter in competitive sports — but even so, the order felt less like policy and more like another broadside aimed at the LGBTQ+ community.

Naturally, I wanted to know how Maine responded. I discovered that on February 14th — Valentine's Day, of all days — Maine formally rejected the President's demand. No Valentine's card for the White House. Instead, Maine sent a clear message: it would not comply with the ban on transgender athletes in women's sports.

Maine had two reasons. First, Title IX is federal law; complying with the Executive Order would have required Maine to break that law. Second, the Maine Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination based on gender identity. The state wasn't about to violate its own statutes either.

That rejection stirred up a hornet's nest. Washington's wheels began spinning immediately. How do you force a state into compliance? No discussion. No negotiation. Just blunt-force politics.

In classic fashion, the administration chose to strong-arm Maine. The plan was simple: accuse the state of noncompliance and threaten to withhold federal funds. That would show them, the thinking went.

It didn't.

*

Four days before the Governor's Meeting, something else caught my attention. Maine State Representative Laurel Libby shared a Facebook post with conservative media outlets featuring a transgender student who had won a girls' pole vault competition. She included the student's name and photos, raising obvious privacy and safety concerns. She emphasized that the student had placed fifth in a boys' event but first in the girls' event. Then she appeared on Fox News to discuss it.

While not directly tied to the President, Libby shares many of his policy positions. She had also asked him to revoke offshore wind turbine permits off Maine's coast. I kept searching for a direct link between her actions and the administration but found none. Still, the timing made me wonder. Was she nudged? Was this part of a setup?

The legislature censured her for her actions, and she is now challenging that censure in court.

*

My next question was obvious: How would the federal government respond to Maine's refusal? The answer came quickly.

On February 22nd — just one day after the Governor's Meeting — the U.S. Department of Agriculture initiated a "*compliance review*" of Maine's food program, citing the state's "*blatant disregard*" for Executive Order 14201. It was clear that the review was political. The findings were released in March.

Maine sued the USDA, and a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order almost immediately. The USDA had not followed its own procedures when it froze Maine's funds. That didn't surprise me. Many of the new appointees likely didn't even know the procedures existed. The USDA was forced to unfreeze the money.

*

Not to be outdone, the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights announced an investigation into the Maine Department of Education and MSAD 51 for alleged Title IX violations.

Then the Department of Justice stepped in, suing Maine for allegedly segregating children with behavioral health disabilities in institutions rather than providing community-based services. Maine settled by agreeing to expand in-home services, address workforce shortages, and improve crisis intervention programs.

On February 26th, State Representative Liz Caruso introduced a bill banning transgender females from participating in girls' and women's sports. At first, I thought the bill might resolve the conflict at the state level. But the more I learned about Caruso and her intentions, the more uneasy I became. I began to suspect the bill was part of a broader effort to roll back gender identity protections in Maine. Supporting it would have been a mistake.

Where were all these attacks coming from? How had the floodgates opened so quickly?

By the end of my research, I was exhausted. My head was spinning. All of this chaos — lawsuits, investigations, political theater — had been triggered by one simple fact:

Maine refused to comply with an order it believed was unlawful.

Chapter 35: The Tariffs Lesson

Olivia had been quite successful interweaving the current political climate with her Constitutional Law course. Today was my turn to try and weave today's political climate with a historical perspective.

I opened my history class the way I often do — by dropping a line that makes my students sit up a little straighter.

"*When the present gets too loud, I reach for the past—not to escape it, but to decode it. Patterns are the closest thing we have to prophecy.*"

A few students exchanged glances. I smiled. Good. I had their attention.

"Today," I continued, "we're hunting patterns in America's tariff history. What were tariffs meant to do? When did they start? Were they good, bad, or just... convenient? And what do today's tariffs hope to accomplish?"

I tapped my tablet. The screen behind me lit up with a single word:

MERCANTILISM

"Who can tell me what mercantilism was?"

Silence. Not even a brave guess.

Another tap. A definition appeared.

> *Mercantilism was the belief that a nation should grow wealthy and powerful by exporting more than it imported and tightly controlling trade through tariffs, regulations, and colonies. This economic belief faded in the 19th century.*

"Sound familiar?" I asked.

Riley Neusbaum — curly hair, sharp nose, sharper mind — shot her hand up. "It says mercantilism ended in the 19th century, but this is basically what we're doing now."

"Exactly." My eyes gleamed. "Patterns."

But the room still looked uncertain, so I pushed on.

"Let's talk about why mercantilism eventually collapsed — only to be resurrected today like a phoenix by the current administration."

A new slide appeared.

In the 19th century, British trade policy was pure mercantilism: funnel wealth to the mother country. The American colonies, by contrast, operated on a looser, more capitalist model — lower taxes, fewer restrictions, more freedom for traders and ship captains. The two systems clashed constantly.

I paced slowly, letting the tension build.

"The British believed global wealth was finite. If you wanted more, someone else had to have less. So, they exported finished goods, imported as little as possible, and used the profits to build ships, roads, and empires."

I paused. "Sound familiar again?"

Now the class was nodding. The pattern was taking shape.

"For the colonies, this meant one thing: you exist to enrich Britain. Your raw materials go overseas. Your finished goods come back at inflated prices. And when Parliament passed the Navigation Acts, even your trading partners were chosen for you."

Another slide. A list of "enumerated goods."

"Cotton, sugar, tobacco, rice, furs, wood, molasses—these could only be exported to England or English colonies. And everything had to travel on English ships. Imagine watching your resources vanish while someone else dictated the price."

A low murmur rippled through the room.

"So, what did the colonists eventually do?" I asked.

A voice from the back: "Revolt."

"Correct. Mercantilism didn't just irritate the colonies — it helped spark a revolution."

I let that settle before moving on.

"Now imagine you've won the American Revolution, and have just broken free. You can trade with anyone. Except... everyone else has tariffs too. Do you copy their restrictive systems?"

"Yup," someone called out. "Do unto others."

"Partially right," Mary said. "But the United States chose something different."

*

A new slide appeared:

RECIPROCITY

"Who knows what this means?"

Trevor MacIntyre, a promising freshman, raised his hand. "Isn't it like... you give me a break; I give you one? Quid pro quo?"

"Exactly. Instead of matching high tariffs, we offered a deal: lower yours, and we'll lower ours."

I clicked again.

Throughout the 1820s and 1840s, economic liberals in Europe began rejecting mercantilist overregulation. British navigation laws loosened. Reciprocity agreements spread. Trade opened. Fees dropped. Free trade began to take root.

"In 1824," I continued, "Congress extended reciprocity to Prussia. Then Bremen and Hamburg. Sardinia. Oldenburg. Russia. Soon, President John Quincy Adams recommended offering reciprocity to any nation willing to treat us equally."

Another slide.

The Marine Reciprocity Act of 1828.

"This act empowered the president to negotiate reciprocal trade agreements. Does that sound familiar?"

Mike McCartney raised his hand. "It's what POTUS just offered the world — equal-footing trade."

Mary smiled. "And how did I open today's class?"

A student answered: "Look for patterns."

"Exactly. *The Marine Reciprocity Act of 1828*... and now, in 2025, the same idea returns. History doesn't repeat itself perfectly — but it rhymes."

I paused, then continued: "But there was still a fly in the ointment. In the late 1820s, customs duties, such as tonnage dues, were still being collected by customs agents by Americans and their trading partners. Tonnage fees were unpopular with shippers and were a trade inhibitor, so in 1830, the U.S. Congress voted to repeal tonnage dues on American ships. Congress then offered the same deal to foreign vessels if their governments would repeal their respective tonnage dues, in other words, reciprocate. Now America's ports were truly wide-open to foreign trade."

"So, what's this racket all about between POTUS and our trading partners, given we already practice free trade and reciprocity?" a freshman student asked. "Isn't that the system that we had before this POTUS tariff stuff started to happen?"

"Not according to POTUS and his people. They allege that the *balance of trade* has become unbalanced, so they are imposing matching tariffs or punitive tariffs in order to rebalance trade in our favor."

The students made a lot of "hms" and "ahs." After looking at previous historical patterns, they understood the new emphasis on U.S. tariffs.

"So that's the historical background on how tariffs were originally used, and how reciprocity agreements have attempted to balance them out. Tariffs come and tariffs go, but in general, they are less desirable than open, reciprocal trade agreements."

I surveyed the class, looking for questions. "Any questions?"

A few hands shot up. I chose to address the question from the young lady from Auburn first.

"I keep thinking back to how we started this discussion. Isn't that what the current administration is trying to do, keep our raw materials here so that we can build our own products?" The student paused, then added, "Isn't what we're trying to do is bring manufacturing back to our country?"

"Yes, that's what the current administration is trying to do — bring manufacturing jobs back to America. But you have to ask yourself if that makes sense. And that's a complex issue. Allow me to explain both sides — then we'll place the answer in a historical context."

*

I had, again, captured the class's attention. They wanted to hear both sides of the story.

"Let's start with the challenges in implementing this 'reshoring' endeavor. First, many manufacturers are struggling to fill existing jobs due to a shortage of skilled workers. Therefore, many American workers will need to be retrained to fill the returning jobs. In the interim, millions of jobs could go unfulfilled. Then you have a scenario where manufacturers can't fill jobs; where tariffs are jacking up the cost of those goods if they come from foreign manufacturers; and suddenly, it is very difficult or costly to obtain the materials and goods you want."

The students were nodding. They were getting the message. I continued.

"Costs to produce goods will become a major complicating factor. Our labor and production costs are among the highest in the world, significantly higher than those of China and Mexico, for instance. So, at this point, you've got a shortage of needed skills; costs to retrain the workforce, which, by the way, is facing a huge wave of retirements; and high salary demands once the jobs return."

I let that sink in, then added another observation.

"Now, there is an exciting scenario developing alongside this job reshoring effort. Modern factories rely heavily on robotics and automation, and that means that even if we reclaim jobs here, there may not be a big influx of new jobs for people, which is the point of bringing jobs back to America."

The students' body language indicated strong interest in this discussion.

"Now, let's look at the other side of the coin. If tariffs make foreign goods more expensive to purchase, but drive job creation, then the American people win. However, remember that to win, we must invest heavily in plant automation, spend significantly on workforce training, and create strong demand for our products both domestically and internationally. And the demand for competitively priced American products will take some effort, given our current relationships with our trading partners. If we fix these problems, this attempt to reshore jobs back to the United States just might work."

I had taken a bit too long to answer the question, and it was only minutes until the class was due to end.

"I'm sorry, everyone, but our time has come to an end. I'll take the remaining questions at the beginning of the next class. Then we'll move into '*Comparative Presidencies*,' where we'll be looking at how much of what is occurring in today's administration has happened before in previous presidencies."

*

I found Olivia in her office after class, and I was eager to tell her how our new "current events" curriculum progressed in my class.

"You should have seen them, Olivia," I proudly stated. "They were on the edges of their seats — in a history class! It was as though they all collectively finally understood what all the hubbub with the POTUS tariffs was all about. They were all talking with each other as they left the classroom. You could tell that they were very excited about what they had just learned and how it applies to all of this POTUS stuff."

Olivia smiled; both of our classes were huge successes. "In my class, I explained the background behind Executive Orders, and showed how they have been used, and how they are currently being abused," she said. "My students were beaming at the end of that class. I think we're onto something."

Chapter 36: Comparing Presidencies

For my next class, I decided that I needed even more energy in the room — more voices, more curiosity, more risk-taking. I talked this over with Olivia, and she and I invented a new game.

*

"Alright, everyone," I announced as students settled in, "today we're playing *Does This Sound Familiar?* The goal is simple: spot the patterns between past administrations and what we see in politics today. Whoever gets the most correct answers wins."

I paused, then added with a grin, "You don't win anything except bragging rights."

A soft laugh rolled through the room. Someone in the back muttered, "Cheapskate," just loud enough for me to hear. I pretended not to.

The first slide appeared:

- Andrew Jackson
- Warren G. Harding
- Ulysses S. Grant
- Richard Nixon
- George W. Bush

Chapter 37: Jackson Populism

"We're going to look at these administrations," Mary said, "and see what echoes we can hear in the present day. Let's start with Andrew Jackson. What do we know about him?"

Silence. Then a hesitant hand.

Amelia Harper, freshman, undeclared, spoke up. "He defeated the British at the Battle of New Orleans... after the war had technically ended."

"Correct. One point for you."

Mary scanned the room. "Anything else about Jackson?"

Eleanor Hudson, a senior history major who practically lived in the archives, raised her hand. "He created the spoils system."

"One point for you," I announced. "And who can tell me what the spoils system was?"

Michael McCartney, front row, eager as ever, answered: "A patronage system. Jackson gave government jobs to his supporters."

"Exactly. Jackson believed long-serving officials grew corrupt, so he swept them out and replaced them with loyalists. 'To the victor belong the spoils.' But of course, appointing friends and allies to powerful positions is also... well... cronyism."

A few students smirked knowingly.

"So," I continued, "does awarding government jobs to loyalists—qualified or not — sound familiar?"

More chuckles. No hands. No one wanted to say the quiet part out loud.

I moved on.

"Before winning in 1828, Jackson ran in 1824. He won the popular vote and had the most electoral votes, but not a majority. The House of Representatives chose John Quincy Adams instead."

A ripple of murmurs. "Election drama in the 1820s? Who knew?" I half-asked, half-stated.

"Jackson claimed the election was '*rigged*,' especially after Adams appointed Henry Clay — who had influence in the House — as Secretary of State. Jackson called it the '*Corrupt Bargain*.'"

I looked around. Students were smiling now. They saw the parallel even if they wouldn't say it.

"Any thoughts on similarities between Jackson's claims and modern presidential politics?"

Silence. No points awarded.

"Alright," I said, "here's another pattern. Jackson ran as an outsider fighting the political elites. He cast himself as the champion of the *'common man.'* In other words, he was a populist."

More smiles. Still no takers.

"One last Jackson topic before we move on: the *Indian Removal Act of 1830*. Congress authorized it; Jackson signed it. It allowed state governments to force Indigenous tribes to relocate west of the Mississippi. Maine didn't have to act on it, but the precedent was clear: the government could move entire populations at will."

I let that hang for a moment.

"Now, this may be a stretch," I said carefully, "but does anyone see a parallel between relocating Indigenous peoples to isolated territories and the federal government relocating migrants to offshore detention facilities?"

The room stayed quiet, but the students were listening more intently now.

"The connection I see," I continued, "is that both groups were treated as 'undesirable,' and the government felt empowered to move them as it pleased. The more things change, the more they stay the same."

Chapter 38: What Harding Didn't Do

"Alright then. Let's turn our attention to Warren G. Harding..."

"Harding's administration. Can anyone tell me anything about President Warren G. Harding?"

Eleanor Hudson again spoke up: "Warren G. Harding's administration was known for political scandals and corruption. The biggest scandal was something called the *Teapot Dome*." Eleanor was yet another walking encyclopedia, and she was, as usual, correct.

"Good job, Eleanor; a point for you. And that puts you in the lead. So, let's move forward. Let's examine a few of the corruption/fraud/graft claims under the Harding administration. For financial corruption, I'd nominate Warren G. Harding, one of the most corrupt presidents, not because he engaged in fraud, but because he did little to prevent bribery and kickbacks from taking place within his administration. The *Teapot Dome Scandal* featured Harding's *Secretary of the Interior*, Albert Fall, a presidential appointee, who secretly leased federal oil reserves in Wyoming and California to private companies. Fall's take was estimated to be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. The bone I have to pick with Harding is that he handpicked the grafters, he put them in office, and he should have exercised some controls over these people."

I paused to let that point sink in.

"As another example of failing to monitor his people, consider the Charles Forbes case. As head of the Veterans Bureau under Harding, Charles Forbes, a presidential appointee, was accused of and convicted of accepting kickbacks from contractors and illegally selling surplus medical supplies. A Senate investigation found that he and his associates had stolen more than $200 million through government contracts. Forbes was fined ten thousand dollars, a mere pittance of what he had stolen, and sentenced to two years in Leavenworth Prison."

"But wait, we're still not done with Mr. Harding and his appointees. Harding's Attorney General, Harry Daugherty, was suspected of selling illegal permits and pardons. Though he was

never convicted, his private secretary, Jess Smith, committed suicide after being informed of his pending arrest."

"Does anyone see a parallel between this pattern of corruption and the present-day administration?"

No takers at this time. Perhaps I needed to be a bit more specific about the failure to control people.

"Does the name 'Elon Musk,' the head of the *Department of Government Efficiency*, also known as DOGE, mean anything to you?"

Several students nodded; they were finally starting to get the point. They were aware of Musk's DOGE activities, including his unsubstantiated claims that the government wastes $50 billion a year on fraudulent payments, and his assertion that his department would cut $2 trillion in government spending. They probably also knew that Musk later revised his projected savings to one hundred and sixty billion dollars."

"Well, here's the parallel between the POTUS/Musk relationship and Harding's financial scandals. Musk's companies, including Tesla and SpaceX, have benefited from government subsidies. Were those subsidies politically motivated? Who knows. But I see a parallel here."

"The more things change, the more they remain the same," I repeated.

Chapter 39: The Grant Assimilation

"Let's move on, then, to Ulysses S. Grant. Grant was a well-intentioned president, but he faced the same problem as Harding: appointing untrustworthy individuals. During his administration, a scandal known as the *Whiskey Ring* took place. This scandal involved a network of government officials, a group of whiskey distillers, and associated distributors who siphoned off millions of dollars of prospective government taxes through evasion. Although Grant was a very honest man, his cohorts, in this case, were not. And because this scandal happened under his watch, he is considered partially responsible for allowing the Whiskey Ring affair."

Michael McCartney spoke up. He was shaking his head "no." This scandal did not tarnish Ulysses S. Grant, in his opinion. "Not buying it," Michael said. "Not buying this guilt-by-association argument. I see the Musk conflict-of-interest thing, but I don't see the presidents as partially responsible for wrongdoing, given that they have thousands of departments that serve them."

"I think each of these presidents would have been better served had they put the proper oversight in place. This administration is removing such oversight. And that's why I'm saying that I feel that they are complicit in the graft that took place. But, well, at least we partially agree on the Musk subsidy point," I surmized.

I thought about Michael's challenge for a moment. "Michael, even though we disagree that these presidents are guilty by association, I'm going to give you a point for presenting a good challenge. Good work!"

Members of the class were smiling. This "point game" was somewhat enjoyable for them.

*

It was time to look at another disturbing aspect of the Grant administration. I continued. "But we're not done with Ulysses S. Grant yet. We need to talk about his 'assimilation' stance."

I paused, and a bunch of quizzical looks came back at me.

"When Grant took office, he was faced with what people called '*the Indian Problem*.' Indians were living on reservations, the government was providing welfare to those Indians, and occasional clashes were occurring between Indigenous people and white people. To remedy this situation, Grant introduced his '*Peace Policy*,' a policy that aimed to assimilate Indigenous cultures into white society. This would be done by forcing Indigenous children to attend schools that forced white culture, white education, spoken English, Christian religions, and citizenship on Indian children. Despite his good intentions, Grant's policies ultimately contributed to the destruction of Native American culture and led to violent conflicts, including the *Battle of the Little Bighorn* in 1876."

"So, where's the parallel between the Grant 'Indian Problem' and the current administration?"

I think several students immediately saw that parallel.

"I would argue that the recently signed Executive Order aimed at the LGBTQ+ communities is tantamount to what Grant did to Indigenous cultures. Grant attempted to make us all the same. The recent Executive Order that targets Title IX does the same thing to another group of people, particularly trans people. It says there are only two sexes, male and female – gender beliefs are no longer an option. It forces those who have differing opinions about their gender into categories they may not wish to be associated with. In both cases, the government is deciding how people are to behave. We all fit into specific categories, apparently."

There was some discussion among the students as they debated whether my point was valid. However, my class was nearing its end, so I pushed forward.

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"Okay, then, we're running low on time, so let me briefly describe parallels between the Nixon Watergate Scandal and George W. Bush's *Iraq Scandal*. Nixon's scandal was caused by illegally eavesdropping on his Democratic competitors. And George Bush's Iraq scandal was caused by presenting tainted intelligence in order to justify a war. In both cases, it can be concluded that

each president looked the other way while others operated on their behalf, driving their agendas. Each president essentially 'lied' to the American people."

"So, I wonder, is there a parallel between what these past administrations did by issuing falsehoods to the American people, and what the current administration is doing? Just food for thought..."

This last parallel generated some discussion amongst the class. And, as usual, it wasn't easy to discuss the behavior of the current POTUS given the contentiousness on both sides of the aisle. The POTUS backers claimed "fake news," "witchhunt," and political targeting by opponents, while the POTUS detractors just looked at them like they were crazy. The class was mimicking present-day America.

The clock in the room showed that it was time for the class to end, so I made myr summary statement: "Okay, you all, here is the main point of today's lecture and discussion. A review of past history reveals that we are repeating several mistakes made by previous administrations. Whether it be financial misdoings, forced relocations, 'rigged' elections, or attempts to control other people's cultures, we've been there before. The more things change, the more they remain the same."

With that final statement, the class came to an end.

*

I returned to my office after class, and took inventory of what I had just taught my class. It seemed to me that half of my class was really "into" what I was teaching. The other half scowled or looked dubious. No mind changes — history be damned...

Chapter 40: The Attack of the Sycophant

My PCPTV managing editor, Warren P. Leybold, sent me down to Augusta, our state capital, on Monday, March 3rd, three days after the POTUS/Mills flare-up. I went directly to the State House, seeking to speak with several of my contacts and acquaintances about the POTUS/Mills event.

As I was searching for a new storyline, several of my contacts informed me that, out of the blue, the *Social Security Administration* (SSA) had just targeted Maine, canceling two programs that serve us. These were programs of convenience to parents of newborns, and for loved ones reporting deaths in their family to the SSA. These were truly heartless program cuts. They were diabolical, punitive cuts aimed at parents, babies and the survivors of the recently deceased.

As I learned more about these program cuts, I knew I was looking at an example of POTUS administration vindictiveness. And these types of service cuts demonstrate the havoc that POTUS loyalists can wreak if given the proper position and authority.

It didn't take long for the Feds to start making life difficult for Mainers in retribution for Governor Mills' resistance to the POTUS's drop-DEI requirements.

*

On March 5, the SSA decided to terminate two services it was delivering to Maine: *Enumeration at Birth* (EAB) and *Electronic Death Registration* (EDR). EAB allows parents to apply for a newborn's Social Security number directly at the hospital. The elimination of this service would mean that parents would have to file manually to obtain Social Security numbers, creating logistical nightmares for parents of newborns. As for EDR, this program enables funeral homes to report deaths to the SSA while filing death certificates electronically. Killing the program would mean that the bereaved would have to submit separate, paper-based documentation and chase that paperwork down should some screw-up occur handling paper...

*

My video crew joined me after lunch, and with them rolling, I began conducting interviews with my contacts on the SSA cuts. The story was already clear in my mind: an ill-informed President who doesn't understand the Title IX law has, as a punitive measure for last week's disagreement with our Governor, started reprisals...

Now, just add a few interviews and perhaps a human element to the story, and suddenly, a story emerges.

My contacts described what the canceled Social Security programs were intended to deliver and explained what the targeted SSA service denial programs were meant to achieve. The only problem was that their answers were evasive. They had no idea what the federal government hoped to achieve by targeting babies and the loved ones of the deceased. It was all so petty.

Anyway, to complete the story, the crew and I took a ride over to *MaineGeneral Medical Center*, Augusta's birthing hospital. *MaineGeneral* is the place to go in the Augusta area if you're having a baby because they offer a range of maternity services, including labor and delivery care, certified nurse-midwives, and they even have a *Neonatal Intensive Care Unit*. There, I found a new father who was willing to share his opinion on the Social Security cuts with me.

The transcript of that interview read like this:

> *"Two days after the Mills/POTUS disagreement, the state of Maine was contacted by the Social Security Administration. Hospitals, medical providers and municipal clerks in Maine were notified that the "enumeration at birth" program would be discontinued. That program allowed parents to fill out applications for Social Security numbers for newborns as part of the birth registration process before leaving the hospital. The SSA also ended the death reporting mechanism, the Electronic Death Registry.*

Through the MaineGeneral Health network, I was able to speak with the father of a newborn, Thomas Leahy, as he exited the hospital after visiting his wife and new baby."

So, the Social Security Administration has found a way to make it more difficult for you to register your baby to obtain a Social Security number by using his birth record. Congratulations, by the way, on your newborn –" I paused.

"Thomas Jr.," Thomas offered. "Thanks."

"A chip off the old block, I'm sure. So, now, to register your baby for a Social Security number, you're going to have to get a form, fill it out, and mail it to the Social Security Administration – instead of having the document and copy of the birth certificate submitted at birth here in the hospital. How do you feel about that?"

"Typical government red tape," Thomas responded. *"I thought they were working on government efficiency – it doesn't sound all that efficient to me."*

Great soundbite, I thought. That would definitely work its way into the final video.

"If you were able to give a message to the Social Security Administration about the stop in service, what would that be?

"I'd say 'we're busy enough here with our new baby. Stop making stuff more difficult. You're the government, you work for the people – serve the people!"

An outstanding soundbite! I concluded the interview by thanking the new father for his time and insights. "And best wishes to you, your wife, and little Thomas Jr.!"

*

"Nice work," was Warren's feedback on my report — short and to the point, just the way he likes our stories told. To him, it was all about flash stories and soundbites. And I had some good ones in that interview.

Chapter 41: MAGA Man

I decided to stay in Augusta for the entire week, looking for stories and tidbits. I had chosen to stay at the *Senator Inn and Spa*, one of the best in town.

Hotel choices in Augusta are somewhat limited; the options are slightly slim unless you prefer budget hotels. I, however, am partial to more upscale hotels, so I chose to stay at the *Senator*. It's a big hotel, with its four spacious wings, and a hundred and a quarter luxury rooms and suites. Some of those rooms feature a fireplace, while others offer an in-room Jacuzzi.

Another thing I like about this hotel is that it has an indoor saltwater and heated lap pool. I wasn't expecting to stay for an entire week in Augusta, so I did not bring my swimsuit. Swimming was, thus, off the table. *Maybe I could get one at the nearby Marden's discount department store*, I thought.

*

Marden's is my favorite store in Maine; it's a Maine staple for budget-conscious shoppers. I once bought two large chandeliers at Marden's – really big ones – for ten dollars each. I just barely fit those boxes in my car...

*

The Senator hotel also offers workout facilities, a hot tub, saunas, and a steam room. I would get up early, I promised myself, to use the "deluxe" workout gym. Well, at least I hoped so...

The hotel restaurant is the "*Cloud 9*," and I'd describe the hotel menu as "*typical traditional*." Yes, they had the usual American fare: wings, burgers, fries, etc., highlighted by, as the hotel puts it: "*exquisite cuisine and impeccable service, ensuring every visit is an elevated experience*." Wow, I had no idea...

That said, the breakfasts are superb, with eggs prepared any style, including my favorite, *Eggs Benedict*. I don't know who "Benedict" was, but I thank him for his culinary imagination every time I visit Cloud 9.

Dinner is not served in the Cloud 9 restaurant; instead, you are directed to the Lounge for tapas, charcuterie, and other offerings, along with, of course, cocktails.

I planned to eat at Cloud 9 Lounge and then return to my room to do some further research on the Social Security Administration's cessation of services. Something smelled rotten in Denmark about the department's punitive action. I wanted to look more closely at the genesis of this situation — it was what I call "suspect."

*

As is typical in Maine in general, restaurants and bars close early, in this case at nine o'clock. A while ago, I heard talk about an advertiser from Boston — I think it was *Dunkin' Donuts* — who was offered a very reasonable rate to advertise on one of our local channels after 9 p.m. Their response was, allegedly: "*Hell no, most of the people in Maine are asleep by then*!" I still chuckle at that story; it's kind of true...

*

Now, here's an old reporter trick to use when seeking interviews in bars: I call it my "*Cocktail Hour Strategy*." You can find some fascinating characters in hotel bars, especially around cocktail hour, between five and six p.m., when they're letting their guard down. And sometimes you'll find politicians who are eager to discuss the latest legislation they are working on, or you'll also find business executives willing to discuss the challenges of doing business in Maine. You'll discover vacationers who love to tell you what their "*Maine experience*" has been like so far. And, if you're lucky, you won't find other reporters who will try to horn in on your interviews. In short, at cocktail hour, you'll find that people are more "talkative" than usual.

Anyway, the hotel bar is called "*The Bar Lounge*." I know, not very imaginative, but it could be worse. It could have been named: "*The White Whale Lounge*," or "*The Red Lobster Lounge*," or some equally trite and tacky cliché. This particular lounge opens at four p.m., and, true to form, it closes, as to be expected, at nine o'clock. Therefore, the window for conducting

sneak-in interviews or conducting story research is somewhat limited, at best, a few hours.

As I crossed the threshold into The Bar Lounge, I heard Toby Keith's "*I Love This Bar*" playing in the background. I wonder if that was happenstance, or if they piped it in regularly because they wanted people remembering that they loved *this* bar. If the latter, I know that song has a subliminal effect on me — I do indeed love The Bar Lounge. Well, at least I think so...

*

This particular night offered few candidates for interviews. The hotel was hosting a hydroelectric convention, but those attendees were in a separate function room. Plus, who wants to talk hydroelectricity all night? Snoresville...

The *Bar Lounge* was practically empty – only one patron and a bartender. *This is a bust*, I thought as I looked around the room. But I returned my attention to the bar's only patron, and I observed that he was a lone businessman. He was dressed in a woolen, plaid, three-piece suit. *Those things went out of style in the 1980s*, I thought. But heck, this is Maine, you can definitely get away with wearing "vintage" clothing here. What really attracted my attention, though, was a pin on the man's lapel: a *Make America Great Again* "MAGA" American Flag pin — about an inch and a half wide, with the American flag used for the background lettering. Much to my delight, I suddenly had an interview candidate!

My *Cocktail Hour Strategy* is a lot like fishing. Sometimes you get lucky, other times you don't. I felt confident that this was going to be one of those "lucky" times. As I sauntered up to the bar, I noticed that the businessman was drinking a draft beer, so making my introduction would be easy. "That looks good," I said, "Do you recommend it?"

The businessman smiled. He welcomed my query. I think he just wanted someone to talk to.

"Well, they've got an interesting brown ale, a decent pilsner, and this: an IPA that's rich in body and not too hoppy. If that sounds good to you, yes, I'd recommend it."

"Perfect," I replied, and asked the bartender for that particular IPA.

"So, are you in town for the engineering convention?" I was making small talk, but my real agenda was to probe the businessman's MAGA philosophy.

"Nope, just here to meet with some state representatives on a matter important to my business. I'm a lobbyist, and one of my clients is a wreath-making company here in Maine. They have a program that makes wreaths and donates a huge portion of the proceeds from their sales to a veteran charity. I'm meeting with some legislative friends of mine who might be able to hook me up with some Washington contacts, such that my employer can expand business to veteran-sympathetic departments within the federal government."

"Admirable," I responded, and I meant it. "And I mean it when I say '*Thank you for your service*' to veterans."

"And you?" the businessman, now identified as a lobbyist, asked.

"I'm a reporter for PCPTV, the digital-first network here in Maine. We capture state and local news and stream it from our station."

He knew of us. It didn't take long for the lobbyist to see an opportunity for his client. *Perhaps I can secure some coverage from this individual for the wreathmaker*s.

"I actually use PCPTV," the lobbyist said. "Great way to get news, just pick and choose what you want and your station lays it all out for me. Nice."

I anticipated that my lobbyist friend would make a push for some local coverage for the wreathmakers, and that was indeed possible, so I listened to his spiel. When he completed his pitch, I made my move.

"I'll certainly pass this potential story off to my editor when I get back to Bangor. But, in the meantime, you could do something for me?" We hadn't shared names, so our meeting was anonymous at this point. "I'm working on a story about the Governor Mills/POTUS spat, and I'm trying to balance it. I know

the state side of the story, but I'm curious as to what you think about these goings-on." I paused, then noted: "And because we haven't shared names yet, this whole discussion can be just between you and me – it can be anonymous. Can I ask you a few questions?"

*

"I can't see the harm in that," the lobbyist replied, "as long as my comments are anonymous."

"You have my word," I guaranteed.

"So, here's my big question, and I hope it's not too personal. I noticed that you're wearing a MAGA lapel button. Is it safe to say you voted for our President, and, if so, why – and if not, why not?"

"Of course I voted for him. Our system of government is broken, and he's going to fix it. He's already issued over a hundred Executive Orders aimed at eliminating job protection for tens-of-thousands of superfluous, lazy government workers; he's coming down hard on abortion; he's getting undocumented aliens out of our country; and he's getting rid of all this queer/gender stuff. Mills was a fool to oppose him on that transgender thing. People don't want transvestites in girls' sports."

I paused for a moment. That little diatribe would have made a great sound bite – except for the transvestites part. That word is no longer in vogue, and hasn't been for some time. Alas, this interview is anonymous.

Should I correct him? I wondered. He had described the trans-women participating in women's sports as "transvestites." A transvestite is a "cross-dresser." They are individuals who wear clothing traditionally associated with a different gender, but they still identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. I decided, "Yes, correct him."

"I take it that you mean 'transgender,' not "transvestite."

"Whatever faggot name you prefer," he chuckled.

Yup, I had expected such an answer. These people just don't understand gender identity, and they don't want to. Male or female, that's it. No exceptions...

I resumed: "But I must say I loved your answer to my original question. It was straightforward and honest. So, let me ask you another question," I continued. "With all of these tariffs, and all of these executive orders, aren't you afraid that POTUS is doing too much 'fixing' of the government?"

"Not at all," came the lobbyist's immediate, confident response. "I used to work as a business consultant in Boston. And, for malfunctioning companies, my firm and I used to recommend to client boards that they consider tearing those companies down and rebuilding them from scratch. That's what's going on here – a restructuring to reformulate government strategies, and a disruption of the current government culture that's bloated, encourages infighting, and obstructs progress. We want everyone in the same boat, believing in the same objectives, and all rowing in the same direction. And, most of all, we want a focus on eliminating government waste and fraud. If we can do all of this, and improve government efficiency, we'll make America great again!"

I smiled, as though I was concurring with his opinion. But what I was really thinking was: *That's an interesting analogy*. Not a very accurate analogy, but interesting. I view the current government's antics as more akin to a *hostile takeover*. The POTUS approach bypasses traditional checks and balances, challenges institutional norms, and reshapes the federal government's role in ways that unsettle long-standing structures such as our world economic system. In business, hostile takeovers involve aggressive acquisitions that can disrupt existing leadership and corporate direction. Typically, raiders bring in a new team, repopulate the company with new people loyal to the new mission, establish a new culture, and, hopefully, enable the company to become more competitive in the long run. But the POTUS approach is even more aggressive. His corporate raiders are dismantling legacy institutions rather than restructuring them for lasting transformation. And, as they do this, they're trying to get all

constituents to line up to support a far-right political agenda. And they're getting rich while doing so.

I returned to my interview. "Again, thanks for letting me probe your thoughts on this matter. I really appreciate your insights."

I couldn't resist. "Just one other question, if that's alright?

"Shoot," said the lobbyist.

"I'm curious to know what you think about the current tariff situation, and its effect on Maine. Is it a good thing or a bad thing for our state?"

The lobbyist smiled. He was now starting to suspect that I was one of those left-leaning journalists, which isn't exactly true, but he answered the question anyway.

"You people need to understand that it takes time to right the ship. Tariffs will be temporarily painful, but in the long run, we'll be more competitive on the world stage. Manufacturing jobs will return to our nation. Our people will be able to find jobs; their children will be able to find jobs; and their children's children will also be able to do the same. Tariffs are good for America; they level the worldwide playing field while bringing jobs back home."

I acknowledged his perspective, but I was thinking, 'That's not the way I see tariffs.' What POTUS has done is declare a trade war with a few enemies, such as China, but also with all of our friendly trading partners. If you declare war on someone, they're no longer likely to be your best friend... As for Maine, we receive a significant amount of goods from Canada, and that has largely been closed off. We rely heavily on tourism, more specifically Canadian tourism, and they're not coming this year. Our hotel owners and tourism service providers are going to get slaughtered this year, just like when COVID was upon us. And this tariff bullshit could be with us for years to come.

*

The lobbyist finished his beer, and I finished mine. I would have bought the next round, but the bar was, of course, closing. It was dark outside, after all, and people had to get home to catch up on

their sleep. I suspected that the whole state would be in bed by nine-thirty and asleep by ten.

"It was a pleasure to meet you, and thanks for the off-the-record insights. They should help me balance future stories. Much appreciated."

"You're quite welcome," the lobbyist said as we shook hands. "And keep up the good work, I love your station. And don't forget to contact my employer, the wreath company. They have a great story to tell." He gave me the contact names and phone numbers, and we bid each other goodnight.

Chapter 42: Delving Into the SSA Matter

On the elevator, I wondered why the current administration would ever cut services to new parents and bereaved families in Maine. "*Talk about dirty pool*," I thought. 45.46 percent of voters in the state of Maine helped put POTUS into power. "Was this the POTUS administration's way of saying: "*Thank you for your votes*?"

*

My room was nice — clean, fresh bedsheets; chocolate mints on the pillow. The covers folded back. Just the way I like it.

I had been offered a room with a king bed, balcony, sitting area, work desk, fireplace, and a jacuzzi tub. Or I could have the same configuration without the balcony for significantly less. I gave our company's travel and expense budget a break and opted not to use the balcony. Who needs a balcony, anyway, in the middle of Winter?

I brushed my teeth, stripped down to my underwear, and climbed into bed with my laptop. The Internet service was impressive; I was getting just under ninety megabits per second, so I could easily stream my story and others on my laptop while sitting in bed.

*

After I finished streaming PCPTV news, I decided to research the Social Security Administration's discontinuation of services in Maine. On the surface, this whole Social Security debacle was being pitched as a means to reduce government spending. To me, however, that was not credible. How could eliminating the EAB and EDR programs in certain states save the government money? It just didn't make any sense.

However, by the same token, Maine constituents would bear the brunt of that decision, having to complete extra paperwork and possibly undertake additional legwork. Additional paperwork would involve relying on the mail to get their files to the right offices, confirming that their forms arrived, and chasing down the problems should something go awry. Legwork could involve taking time out of constituents' time schedules to journey to a

Social Security office to straighten out any SNAFUs. The move would also likely create manpower issues at the Social Security Administration. Somebody would have to handle the paperwork, process it, and file it. It would add cost and confusion to the process. And, after all, isn't the new administration all about *government efficiency*? I was bugged; I wanted to know what was really going on.

When I went to bed, I still had not figured out what game the Social Security Administration was playing. Something smelled fishy – and it wasn't me. But I couldn't figure out what the SSA's motivation was. I planned to keep digging.

Chapter 43: The Petulant Child

The following day, Governor Mills' people did not offer a press conference. But I still needed a story. Given that there was no response coming from the Governor's office, there wasn't much to report in state government activities.

I did post a quick story about some legislators who were thinking about challenging the *Maine Civil Rights Act* to remove trans girls from girls' sports allowance. However, that was essentially just speculation at that point; no concrete action had occurred yet in terms of submitted legislation.

Without access to the Governor, I made a few phone calls and arranged an interview with the wreath makers that the lobbyist had mentioned to me. They were just up the coast near Bar Harbor – so, maybe two hours away. So, I traveled up there to meet them. It turned out to be a great "*feel-good*" story – a local business donating proceeds to needy veterans.

*

The next day, I learned that the SSA denial-of-service order had been rescinded. WTF?

The reason, reported by other members of the press, was that, according to Lee Dudek, the Acting Commissioner of the Social Security Administration, his office *suddenly realized* that their action created an undue burden on Maine parents. Duh.

Dudek said, "In retrospect, I realize that ending these contracts created an undue burden on the people of Maine, which was not the intent."

Oh horseshit, I thought.

"For that, I apologize and have directed that both contracts be immediately reinstated. EAB and EDR continue in place for every state and were not affected," Dudek contritely stated.

Nice excuse; hardly believable.

*

As it turned out, pulling SSA services from Maine proved not to be an administrative error. Reporters in Washington continued to dig until they found an email to Dudek's staff that revealed the Acting Commissioner, our friend Dudek, had referred to our Governor Mills as a "*petulant child*." And soon thereafter, his administrative excuse for terminating the programs became evident. He admitted to the *New York Times* that his actions were indeed politically motivated. "*I was ticked at the governor of Maine for not being real cordial to the president. I screwed up, I'll admit I screwed up.*"

Imagine having thousands of these obsequious, self-aggrandizing POTUS-appointed people in decision-making positions executing his policies, making independent decisions to punish constituents in order to promote the POTUS agenda. I think it's dangerous; pandemonium would ensue. We could all become targets of these "mission-from-God" zealots.

Democratic Congressional Representative Chellie Pingree recognized the ploy and slight by the Social Security administrator, noting his blind allegiance to the President. She called for Dudek's immediate resignation, describing his behavior as a "*fundamental betrayal of public trust*." Governor Mills also followed with a statement that Social Security should be treated as a public trust, not submitted to "*rushed and reckless cuts*."

Is it just me, or does this kind of allegiance feel like authoritarianism at work, supported unquestioningly by an army of sycophants? Do they even understand what they're doing to America?

Chapter 44: "Compliance"

While Alex was in Augusta, Mary and I were tracking federal government versus Maine activities online and in the press.

On March 10th, the *United States Department of Agriculture* (USDA) targeted my employer, the *College of Maine*. They temporarily paused funding for the College of Maine System while conducting a Title IX "compliance review" to determine if further action was needed. The College of Maine system has $63 million in active USDA awards, primarily affecting activities on our main campus. Approximately $35 million remained to be paid out.

The College of Maine System responded to the USDA's compliance review, informing the department that the College does not permit student-athletes who were assigned male at birth to participate in women's sports and that no such student-athletes are part of any women's program within the college system. The College confirmed that its athletic programs comply with state and federal laws and NCAA policies, *which do not permit male-assigned athletes to compete in female sports*. I think those idiots over at the USDA assumed that, because our Governor had argued in favor of trans students in women's sports, we had a whole bunch of 'em at The College. Hence, the compliance review...

So, obviously, the College was already in compliance with the POTUS Executive Order. This whole fracas, it appears, was about two trans students in a high school in Southern Maine.

Even though the College of Maine had informed the USDA that it had no trans athletes at our school, the USDA would not go away. The USDA halted *all payments* to the College on March 11, 2025, pending further determination of necessary action. The College complied, yet it did not receive direct notice from the USDA regarding the details of the investigation. The College was flying blind on the USDA compliance requirements and potential forthcoming punishments. We were at the whim and fancy of the POTUS faithful.

*

The POTUS administration was not quite done with its assault on Maine educational institutions. The *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* indicated that its ironically named "*Office for Civil Rights*" (OCR) found that the *Maine Department of Education, Maine Principals' Association* and *Greely High School* were all in violation of Title IX for allowing transgender students to compete in girls' sports. Now, remember, Title IX supports *protections* for trans students. Does sending threatening notices to the *Department of Education*, the *Maine Principals' Association*, and a local school sound like the Department of Health and Human Services has the well-being of Title IX-protected students in mind? This investigation should not have been initiated in the first place, as it involves breaking the law. But the Office for "*Civil Rights"* apparently chose to interpret the Title differently...

Civil rights are defined as fundamental freedoms and protections that *every person* is entitled to under the law. And the LAW Title IX says that transgender students can participate in women's sports – at least that's how it has been interpreted to date. I thought: *How can this "civil rights office" claim that those institutions are violating the civil rights of biological women by allowing transgender people to participate in women's sports? What fundamental civil rights are biological women being denied?* In my opinion, the so-called *Office for Civil Rights* was in direct violation of the civil rights of transgender people, given the way the LAW is currently written.

So, watch the *Maine Principals' Association* response to the OCR, it's priceless. Days later, the MPA informed the Office for Civil Rights that the Principal's Association IS NOT OBLIGATED TO COMPLY with Title IX because it receives NO FEDERAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE from any federal agency, directly or indirectly. I laughed heartily when I read that response. I thought: *"Perhaps the inept OCR should know what it is talking about before sending out threatening communications..."*

*

After that embarrassing correction, you'd think the OCR might become more circumspect. But the saga of the OCR's campaign of ineptness wasn't quite over. The new target: the *Maine Department of Education*. On March 19th, the OCR's "compliance review" found that – surprise, surprise – the Maine Department of Education violated Title IX by allowing transgenders who were assigned male at birth to compete in girls' sports, and by allowing transgender student-athletes to use "girls' *intimate* facilities."

Allowing transgenders who have penises to compete against girls is a right guaranteed by Title IX. If you don't like that, you change the law. You don't try to enforce an illegal order just to please your POTUS.

In my opinion, however, that "*intimate facilities*" accusation bore closer scrutiny.

Chapter 45: "Intimacy"

Mary and I joined each other for dinner, this time at my place. I cooked a recipe from a decades-old *New York Times Cookbook* that had been in my possession for about thirty years. The recipe is called "*Cognac Burgers*." It's fun to make, especially when you set the burgers on fire and blue flames rise out of the frying pan!

You start by putting ground beef in a mixing bowl, then add salt, pepper, garlic, shallots, Cognac, and Dijon mustard. You mush all that stuff together, then form it into patties. They need to sit for about fifteen minutes to allow the flavors in the mix to absorb. You then heat the skillet, add a little vegetable oil, and cook the burgers to your desired doneness. But here's the fire part: in a small pan, you heat a little cognac, and wait til it gets warm. Then you light it and pour it over your burgers in the frying pan. Stand back as a blue flame envelops the burgers, and they emerge with a distinct charred cognac flavor. Scrumptious...

*

As we ate dinner and drank "a little" wine, we got a little silly. We were still bemused by the POTUS Executive Order 14168 that he signed on January 20, 2025, entitled "*Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government*." During the POTUS campaign, he had a bizarre rally where he announced that he was going to "*protect*" women, whether they needed it or not. This Executive Order appears to be the manifestation of that promise.

Order 14168 is the one that recognizes only two sexes, male and female, based on the biological sex assigned at the time of conception. What we were laughing about was its requirement that agencies ensure that all "*intimate spaces*" such as bathrooms are to be used by proper biological sex individuals, rather than those poor, confused people who don't understand their gender identities.

"I'm probably in the minority on this one, but I disagree with the government's position on the use of the term '*intimate facilities*' as it describes the transsexual experience in the girls'/women's bathroom. First of all, what "*intimate*" activities are taking place in women's bathrooms? Second, I see myself as a woman. You will

never find me sauntering up to a urinal to take a leak. So, how do you justify denying me the use of a woman's bathroom?"

Mary agreed: "In women's rooms, *all the 'private' activities take place behind stall doors*."

"So then, so here's an observation," I offered. I looked up the word "intimate" on my phone. "*Intimate* means personal and private and is applied to something deeply connected to someone's *emotions or thoughts*. Using the bathroom does not reach into my soul and does not deeply connect with my emotions or thoughts," I observed. "Maybe I'm missing a deeper bathroom experience?"

Mary liked that and chuckled, then added to the absurdity of using the word "intimate" to describe bathroom activities. She looked-up *intimate* on her phone. "Intimate can also mean *close and familiar*, as in a *strong, close relationship, whether between friends, family, or romantic partners*. Getting close and familiar in a bathroom just doesn't happen."

I grinned, agreed, and kept it going as I looked again at my phone. "Let's try a different definition of 'intimate.' Intimate can also *mean having a deep understanding or expertise in something*, like an intimate knowledge of a subject. So, the administration is accusing us trans people of going into a women's room to express our deep understanding or expertise in something? Of what? Human body functions? That's just gross."

Mary grinned and shook her head. She thought for a while, trying to outdo my last definition of "intimate". She finally came up with another meaning for "intimate." "Intimate can also mean '*a setting that feels personal*.' Maybe that's what the government means by intimate. Bathrooms feel personal, don't you think?" she contended, then continued. "However, this definition of 'intimate' is usually applied to an intimate, small group of people – a close-knit group. Sorry, going to the bathroom is not a close-knit experience for me, and it doesn't appear to be so for the other girls and women I share bathrooms with. It's the opposite, get in and get out. Contrary to what the government thinks, we don't all gather in the bathroom for a close-knit *Kum Ba Yah* experience."

We had finally exhausted the definitions of "intimate," and we decided that the government apparently has no understanding whatsoever of what goes on in women's rooms.

*

As long as we're on the topic of women's bathrooms, I have a little insight into our bathroom behavior; this is specifically and explicitly for the *Office of Civil Rights*, the organization responsible for enforcing "*intimate bathroom experiences*," or as I like to think of them, enforcing IBEs. They probably have a special IBE Team; an IBE Team sounds really important. I wonder if they actually have "*IBE Administrator*" and "*IBE Security Specialist*" positions within the OCR. Or maybe even "*IBE Toilet Paper Specialists*?"

Anyway, here's my message: *In the women's bathroom, we women have our own etiquette. It includes respecting privacy, ensuring that you flush, keeping loud exhaust sounds to a minimum, disposing of female items into the proper containers, and practicing proper handwashing. Light chatter is fine, but we try to avoid overly personal discussions that everyone else would be subject to hearing. And, if you splash water around the sink, clean it up!*

Just to reinforce: there is no "*intimate contact*" taking place in women's bathrooms across America. We "go," we wash, we check our makeup – and we're outta there. And we trans women *strive really hard to not infringe upon other biological women's bathroom civil rights* in the process.

*

Oh, and one final comment on denying us transwomen the right to use a female bathroom. Imagine yourself dressed and made-up like a woman. You're wearing a dress; you have a bra. You have boobs. And you walk into a men's bathroom where men are using the facilities. At first, the men would be shocked. What is this woman doing in her? Then some would smile, like, *'Come on over here, baby.*' Others quickly zip up so that I don't see their genitals — that's fine, that's modesty. Others, when they realize I'm a biological man dressed as a woman, look at me with hostility. Homophobia runs deep; those guys look like they want

to punch you. Others think you're a pervert, and they can't get away quickly enough.

As a transwoman you're a pariah, an unwelcome, nasty, tainted thing if you enter the men's room in woman's garb. If you were me, under these circumstances, would you want to go into a men's room?

Chapter 46: Trouble in River City

It was the final day of my stay in Augusta, and I knew that Mlpita was probably getting anxious waiting for my return to Bangor. As often happens to me, I woke up with a tune in my head. It was "*Ya Got Trouble*" from the musical "*The Music Man*" starring Robert Preston and Shirley Jones. "*Oh you got trouble – right here in River City...*"

Augusta doesn't have a nickname, so I imagine that Augusta could be called '*River City.*' After all, the mighty Kennebec River flows through it. But most Mainers just call it "*the Capital,*" or the "*Pine Tree State Capitol.*" It's too bad that "*The Big Apple*" was already taken...

But, back to the song echoing in my brain. We do indeed "*got trouble, right here in River City.*" The federal government has initiated a campaign of intimidation for non-compliance, withholding funds for state operations, including education and meal provisioning. The state of Maine is resisting the federal government's punishments and retributions by challenging the U.S. federal government in court.

Which governmental agencies will win these battles – the Federal or state governments?

I had extended my stay in Augusta because there were interviews to be had; the POTUS administration was attacking Maine on multiple fronts, and those stories needed to be reported. I couldn't leave quite yet. Poor Mlpita would have to go a few more days without me.

*

Meanwhile, on POTUS's inaptly-named "*Truth Social,*" his social media site, the President posted:

> *"We have not heard from the Governor herself, and she is the one who matters in such cases. Therefore, we need a full-throated apology from the Governor herself and a statement that she will never make such an unlawful challenge to the Federal Government again before this case can be*

settled. I'm sure she will be able to do that quite easily."

A "full-throated" apology for abiding by the law? Methinks POTUS should have written that he was intending to make a "full-throated" apology to Governor Mills for insisting that she break the law.

But what do you do if the Governor of Maine fails to issue a full-throated apology? And, by the way, what is a "*full-throated apology*?" Here's what you do: *you apologize for her*. You tell everyone she apologized, even if she did not. In POTUS-world, POTUS posted: "*State of Maine has apologized for their Governor's strong, but totally incorrect, statement.*" There, that settles it – the Governor apologized, right?

Wrong-o. So, if she didn't apologize, then who did? Was it the entire state of Maine that apologized for the POTUS/Mills spat? Was it a Maine legislator? Or perhaps one of the State House janitors. I know for sure it wasn't Governor Mills. Secretary of State Shenna Bellows reiterated that there had been no apology, and Governor Mills, instead, emphasized her commitment to the rule of law and the separation of powers.

My news story, after all of POTUS's bluster, essentially called his apology claim a lie.

*

On March 27, 2025, the *Maine School Administrative District 51*, which serves the communities of Cumberland and North Yarmouth, including those with transgender students, responded to a compliance review by the Office for Civil Rights. MSAD51 confirmed its commitment to *state law* per the Maine Human Rights Act (MHRA) regarding trans students. Superintendent Jeffrey Porter stated that the district will continue to abide by state regulations and said that he had been in discussions with the Maine Principals' Association regarding the matter.

At that time, the Maine Attorney General's Office, which represents the *Maine Department of Education*, stated that it had no comment or update on whether it would sign a letter of

compliance with the Office of Civil Rights regarding prohibitions on trans students. Closed-door negotiations would come soon thereafter.

*

On March 28, 2025, our buddies at the highly competent *Office for Civil Rights* referred their non-compliance notice to the *U.S. Department of Justice*, citing Maine's failure to comply with the POTUS anti-trans Executive Order.

Three days later, the *U.S. Department of Education* sent Maine a "*final warning*." The impetuous state of Maine, I suspect, was quaking in its L.L. Bean Duck Boots.

Well, not really...

*

The DOE gave Maine ten days to sign a letter of compliance. Otherwise, Maine would be subject to criminal prosecution.

Capitulate, or else! was the DOJ's message. They followed up by sending this letter to the *Maine Department of Education*:

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

WWW.ED.GOV

400 MARYLAND AVENUE, SW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202-1100

March 19, 2025

Pender Makin, Commissioner
Maine Department of Education
23 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0023
Sent via email: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Re: Directed Investigation No. 01255902
Maine Department of Education
Letter of Finding of Noncompliance

Dear Commissioner Makin:

This letter is to inform you of the outcome of the directed investigation of the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) into the Maine Department of Education (MDOE), which OCR initiated on February 21, 2025 (Investigation).

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 *et seq.*, and its implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. Part 106, prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. As a recipient of federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education (Department), MDOE is subject to these laws and regulations. Additional information about the laws OCR enforces is available on our website.

The Investigation examined whether MDOE is in continuing violation of Title IX by permitting, directing, instructing, or requiring Maine school districts to: (1) allow males to participate in female athletics (whether interscholastic, intercollegiate, club or intramural); and (2) deny to female students (particularly, female student-athletes) access to intimate facilities on the basis of sex, such as female-only locker rooms and bathrooms.

In accordance with OCR's Case Processing Manual (CPM) (February 19, 2025), OCR has reached the determinations set forth in this letter by using a preponderance of the evidence standard as to whether there is insufficient evidence to support a conclusion of noncompliance, or evidence supporting a conclusion of noncompliance.

Based on the evidence obtained, OCR has determined the evidence supports a conclusion of noncompliance with Title IX by MDOE. OCR notes that public school districts throughout the State of Maine that receive federal financial assistance and have policies or practices that allow boys to participate in girls' athletics programs and/or deny female students access to female-only intimate facilities, are similarly in violation of Title IX. Should MDOE fail to direct the public school districts in its jurisdiction to adopt and implement policies and practices that comply with Title IX, OCR may initiate additional investigations into such school districts.

OCR's findings and conclusions are discussed below.

Rather than go through all 10 pages, here's the letter's closing analysis and summary:

Analysis

The plain language of the Maine HRA and Joint Rule can be interpreted in a way that conforms to the nondiscrimination requirements of Title IX and its implementing regulations. However, MDOE has chosen to interpret those laws (and issue guidance and directives to SAUs) in a way that conflicts with Title IX to the detriment of female student-athletes in violation of Title IX. In so doing, MDOE is also causing SAUs to violate Title IX.

MDOE's interpretation of the Maine HRA and Joint Rule, and school districts' reliance on MDOE's rules and guidance embodying that interpretation, have resulted and continue to result in girls and young women throughout Maine having no school sports teams, events, or categories for which eligibility to join and participate is open only to female students. Rather, Maine female student-athletes train, practice, try out, compete, and strive for success in a school athletics system that refuses to give girls and young women the genuine opportunity to benefit from school sports that Title IX requires.

Such denial of benefits on the basis of sex is not based on the plain language of the applicable federal (or even State law), but on guidance and interpretations provided to SAUs by MDOE exercising its significant influence and authority over the school districts under its jurisdiction. Though MDOE's motivation is not pertinent to the determining its noncompliance, it appears that MDOE is choosing its policies in unwarranted deference to the ideology of "gender identity," proponents of which insist that "nondiscrimination based on gender identity" must equate to treating individuals according to subjective "gender identities" rather than based on sex even in circumstances where sex classifications exist to protect the rights, safety, and equal opportunities of girls and women.

Publicly available information, with no contrary facts presented by MDOE during this Investigation, demonstrates by a preponderance of the evidence that at least three male athletes recently have competed (in multiple sports, in numerous competitions/events) in Maine high school athletics competitions designated for girls/women and used locker rooms or bathrooms designated for girls/women. Title IX simply does not permit the bait-and-switch of promising female student-athletes a girls' competition and a girls' locker room while actually permitting males to participate in the activity or access the space. Moreover, whether or not any male students had actually participated, a policy that *would allow* boys/men to participate in sports programs designated for girls/women facially violates Title IX.

Nothing about the plain language of the Maine HRA or Joint Rule requires Maine school districts to let students choose which sex-separated sports team they want to join or which sex-separated intimate facility they want to access. Consistent with the requirements of both Title IX and the Maine HRA, MDOE guidance could instruct SAUs to provide sex-separated sports and intimate facilities while also prohibiting "discrimination based on gender identity" because all students – regardless of expressing a belief about "gender identity" – would have the opportunity to participate in sports and use facilities, on the basis of the objective characteristic of sex. Avoiding "discrimination based on gender identity" does not inherently require an institution to act as though an individual's "gender identity" beliefs (subjective, mutable feelings) are true or determinative of the individual's sex (an objective, immutable characteristic).

A recipient's obligation to comply with Title IX is not obviated or alleviated by any state or local law. 34 CFR § 106.6(b). Nevertheless, it does not appear that Maine's laws need to be amended in order to bring MDOE into conformity with the requirements of Title IX and its implementing regulation – if MDOE were committed to complying with federal law as MDOE assured the Department it would do as a condition to federal funding.

MDOE, however, has elected to direct and advise SAUs to allow boys and men to participate in sports programs and access intimate facilities designated for girls and women. Accordingly, OCR has determined the evidence supports a conclusion of noncompliance with Title IX.

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Based on presumably similar factual findings and legal standards, it is highly likely that numerous school districts under MDOE's jurisdiction are also in continuing violation of Title IX for implementing formal or informal policies or practices that fail to protect their own girls' teams and sports categories as female-only (such as at Portland High School, Maine Coast Waldorf High School, and Greely High School), allow girls on their own girls' teams to compete against girls' teams that have become mixed-sex due to the participation of a male athlete (such as against the foregoing public schools and also private schools like Proctor Academy and North Yarmouth Academy), and fail to provide girls with female-only intimate facilities. The federal funding of SAUs across Maine is thus at risk so long as MDOE remains out of compliance with Title IX.

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Conclusion

This concludes OCR's investigation. This letter of findings of noncompliance should not be interpreted to address MDOE's compliance with any other statutory or regulatory provision or to address any issues other than those addressed in this letter.

This letter is accompanied by a draft resolution agreement that specifies the actions that, when taken by MDOE, will remedy both the individual discrimination at issue and any similar instances where future violative conduct may recur. In light of the serious facial and as-applied aspects of MDOE's violations of Title IX, OCR will conclude that attempts to secure MDOE's voluntary compliance are at an impasse unless MDOE executes a resolution agreement within 10 days of the date of this letter.

If no agreement has been executed by that date, OCR will issue to MDOE a letter of impasse that confirms MDOE's refusal to voluntarily come into compliance with Title IX and informs MDOE that OCR will issue a letter of impending enforcement action 10 days following the letter of impasse. Unless MDOE executes a resolution agreement by that time, the letter of impending enforcement action will notify MDOE that OCR is referring its non-compliance determinations to

the U.S. Department of Justice for enforcement including termination of MDOE's funding from the Department.

Respectfully,

BRADLEY BURKE Digitally signed by BRADLEY BURKE Date: 2025.03.19 11:16:48 -05'00'

Bradley R. Burke
Regional Director

*

I think this is a fine example of your tax dollars at work. The *Office of Civil Rights*, acting like a bootlicker to the President and the Department of Justice, is just waiting to act on any minor alleged infraction deemed by the department to be obstructionist a justification to pursue litigation.

A lot of time, effort, and money will be spent pursuing these fool's errands, but money appears to be no object when you have the deep pockets of the United States taxpayer, and when you're attempting to beat states into submission. You can bet the OCR will lose this battle. But will they win the war?

Chapter 47: Loyalist Legislators Appear

I went home for a few weeks, did a few local interest stories and played ball with Milpita, then returned to Augusta on *April Fool's Day*, April 1st. And to my delight, upon my arrival, the following story emerged.

At the State House, the time had now arrived for POTUS loyalists in the *Maine State Legislature* to become involved in the POTUS/Mills embroilment. On April 1st, the fools had come out. Several Maine Republican state representatives decided to submit legislation to amend the *Maine Human Rights Act* in order to deal with the obstacle that was causing the POTUS/Mills squabble in the first place: trans girls on girls' sports teams. The first bill would take the proper corrective action by disallowing biological boys from competing in girls' sports. The other bill would remove the term "*gender identity*" from the Maine Act. Take a wild-assed guess as to the origin of that directive...

Think back to Maine State Representative Laurel Libby, the state representative who decided to share a Facebook post of a transgender Maine student to stoke the fire with various conservative news outlets. For that action, the Maine Legislature decided to censure her. On March 11th, she sued the state of Maine for that censure.

On April 1st, the Maine Attorney General's Office filed a motion to dismiss Rep. Laurel Libby's lawsuit. This motion to dismiss concluded: "*The Court should dismiss the complaint for lack of subject matter jurisdiction and failure to state a claim.*" These are technicalities, but I believed that Maine would likely lose this case because the courts will decide that the censure violates First Amendment rights. Notice, the protection of freedom of speech works both ways in the court system. At least for now...

To add insult to injury, according to *The Bangor Daily News*, Laurel Libby is now seen as a leading candidate for the Republican gubernatorial nomination seat in 2026. Let's see, you choose to attack trans-teenagers and put them at risk, so now you appeal to the MAGA crowd? *Valgame Dios*!

Chapter 48: Maine Fights Back

During the previous week, on Monday, March 25, 2025, Maine Attorney General Aaron Frey, in conjunction with 18 other attorneys general, joined a multi-state lawsuit challenging a POTUS Executive Order that sought to reshape U.S. elections.

Frey also addressed broader concerns that day about what he described as "*politically motivated federal investigations into Maine's compliance with Title IX, particularly regarding transgender rights in schools*." He emphasized the state's legal readiness to push back against what he called "*revenge-driven*" actions by the administration.

Maine was the first recipient of this type of government pressure to follow POTUS executive orders. Many other states would follow...

Chapter 49: The Slugfest

The battles that Maine fought with the federal government in March paled in comparison to the battles it would fight with the nit-picky U.S. Federal Government in April and May. As the leading political reporter for PCPTV, I covered all of these stories.

*

On April 2nd, POTUS announced "*Liberation Day*," the day that the POTUS administration decided to hike tariffs for trading "partners" around the world. After he declared trade war, guess who no longer wanted to "partner" with us... Answer: everybody!

Also on that day, the *United States Department of Agriculture* announced that it would indeed be freezing Maine funds. The USDA had found Maine, surprise-surprise, out of compliance with specific federal mandates. Title IX was one of those mandates. So, the USDA froze almost three million dollars in federal funding – and get this: that funding was earmarked to feed one hundred and seventy-two thousand Maine school children! Talk about fighting dirty – you're going to punish children for the state's lack of compliance? That's despicable!

To add insult to injury, the President's appointed Agriculture Secretary, Brooke Rollins, sent a letter to Governor Janet Mills warning that the funding pause was just the beginning unless the state aligned with federal directives. Here's what it said:

Secretary Brooke L. Rollins
Washington, D.C. 20250

April 2, 2025

GOVERNOR JANET MILLS
1 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Governor Mills:

You cannot openly violate federal law against discrimination in education and expect federal funding to continue unabated. Your defiance of federal law has cost your state, which is bound by Title IX in educational programming. Today, I am freezing Maine's federal funds for certain administrative and technological functions in schools. This is only the beginning, though you are free to end it at any time by protecting women and girls in compliance with federal law.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is additionally reviewing all research and education-related funding in Maine for compliance with the Constitution, federal laws including Titles VI and IX, and the priorities of the Trump Administration. Under President Trump's leadership, USDA is ensuring state educational, research, and other entities receiving federal taxpayer funds comply with federal laws or correct and remediate any violations.

In order to continue to receive taxpayer dollars from USDA, the state of Maine must demonstrate compliance with Title IX's protection of female student athletes from having to compete with or against or having to appear unclothed before males.

USDA, alongside other federal agencies, will continue to pause and, where appropriate, terminate categories of education programming in Maine if these Title IX violations are not resolved to the satisfaction of the Federal Government. This pause does not impact federal feeding programs or direct assistance to Mainers; if a child was fed today, they will be fed tomorrow.

In addition, USDA has launched a full review of grants awarded by the Biden Administration to the Maine Department of Education. Many of these grants appear to be wasteful, redundant, or otherwise against the priorities of the Trump Administration. USDA will not extend the Biden Administration's bloated bureaucracy and will instead focus on a Department that is farmer-first and without a leftist social agenda.

We look forward to the State's cooperation with all federal reviews and future compliance with federal law and policy.

Sincerely,

Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture

I spoke with Maine's Attorney General Aaron Frey about this matter, and he objected to the tone of the letter. Another reporter, however, got the sound bite when he got Aaron to describe the Rollins' letter as: "Sounding more like a hostage taker seeking a ransom payment than a cabinet-level federal official."

To clarify its funding freeze, the USDA claimed that child nutrition programs in Maine would not be impacted. Yet, the *Good Shepherd Food Bank*, which planned to buy 600,000 pounds of local produce, lost funding. And *more than 150 school districts saw cuts to their local food budgets*. But wait, there's more. Various grants for farmers, you know, the people who grow our food, were also frozen.

*

Now it was time for the *Department of Justice* to become involved once again. On April 4th, in conjunction with the *U.S. Department of Education*, the DOJ announced the formation of its Title IX "*SIT*" team. *SIT team?* I wondered. *Hmmmm*. I immediately thought that SIT stood for "*Spanish Inquisition Team*." It doesn't, though; I stood corrected. It stands for *Special Investigation Team*. How silly of me...

I wondered if the new SIT team members get to wear jackboots.

The purpose of this team is to streamline Title IX investigations, apparently because Title IX has apparently become a matter of national security and a threat to our very existence. The team is involved in evaluating trans-female athletic programs and gender-related policies in schools.

*

Not to be upstaged by the Federal Government, Maine state Republican lawmakers unveiled two bills to amend the Maine Human Rights Act in an effort designed to bring the state into compliance with Title IX. One bill would make it so students who were assigned male at birth cannot participate in girls' or women's sports. The other bill would remove the term "*gender identity*" from the Act.

*

April 8th. This DOJ provocation deserves special mention. On this day, the Feds pulled $1.5 million from the Maine *Department of Corrections* because Maine has a policy allowing transgender inmates to be housed in facilities with which their genders align. These cuts affected substance use treatment, communications, and support for incarcerated parents. All this effort for just one inmate? The POTUS splitting-hairs groups are climbing under every rock they can find to locate "*violations*." And yet, what LAW is being violated?

*

On April 14, the Maine school board for MSAD 70 announced that it would align with the President's anti-DEI executive order, despite the decision directly violating Maine's Civil Rights laws and the fact that the Executive Order was not a law — Title IX was. *Haters?*

*

On April 16, the DOJ announced a civil lawsuit against Maine, again targeting DEI non-conformance for "failing to comply with federal law." You would think the Department of Justice would be able to determine that the federal law is actually the Title IX provision, not the President's executive order. Perhaps it's time to open their law books?

*

Lastly, in March, Linda McMahon secured the position of *Secretary of Education* under the President of the United States. Yes, the same Linda McMahon who referred to Artificial Intelligence as A1, a popular steak sauce here in the U.S. We saw A1 steak sauce sales surge after that. I bought two...

Flexing her muscles, she quickly announced her position on Title IX. "*To all the entities that continue to allow men to compete in women's sports and use women's intimate facilities: there's a new sheriff in town. We will not allow you to get away with denying women's civil rights any longer.*"

Can you believe this Wild West stuff coming from the head of a U.S. Department?

I, of course, added my own extension to this nonsense. "*Well, giddy-up pardners, my posse and I are coming after y'all. This is the last time you'll put our ladies in peril, denying our fair maidens their women's civil rights. Our deputies will find you, rope you, and punish you for your dastardly activities! Git along now...*"

Wow, Sheriff, *my* L.L Bean Duck Boots are quaking...

Chapter 50: The College of Maine Assignment

While all the fisticuffs were going on between the state of Maine and the Feds, other stuff was happening at the College of Maine. I received an assignment to investigate the status of federal funding cuts specifically targeting the College. And there was way more going on at the College than I had expected.

I called ahead and arranged a meeting with the Vice President of Finance and Controller in her office at Alumni Hall on the main campus. And wow, was she packed with information about the Federal Government cuts and fund suspensions.

We started by establishing that The College had become the target of several federal punitive actions. The Controller told me, on video, that the College had experienced cuts to more than forty federal research and service grants. The extent? "The College has seen $50 million in contracts either paused or canceled," the VP intimated. Amazing, I thought – *the Feds were still up to their dirty tricks*. I also thought: *Impactful sound bite*!"

The VP went on to break down the College's losses. "We've seen 23 grants terminated for no apparent reason. That's $7.8 million in unrecoverable funding. Nineteen more of our grants are 'paused,' whatever that means. And we lost $17.1 million in totally suspended funds."

Great soundbite, I smiled.

Looking for another sound bite, I asked: "And how does the College feel about this huge loss in funding?"

"I'll give you one word: 'Unfair.'"

Now that was not a great sound bite. I needed more context and more emotion, so I pressed on until I got a decent summary sound bite.

But we weren't done yet...

Much to my delight, the Controller continued to detail Federal government actions against the College of Maine. "The College is known as a leader in Forestry, with one of the highest-rated rankings in forestry education in the United States," the VP

confidently stated. "And yet they've defunded several of our community-reach programs." She paused before her following statement, considering whether to make an accusation. She did: "Our school was targeted by the *U.S. Department of Agriculture*. They went after our "*AgrAbility*," a program, that provides support for farmers, fishermen, and loggers with *disabilities*. Training and client services were *canceled* due to the Federal government's withdrawal of funds."

"*Disabilities*?" I clarified. "They shut off funds for people with disabilities!"

"Affirmative," the Controller answered.

I now had my next story – the Feds cutting off disability funding for disabled people! Not only was that contemptible, but it was also an odious – a stinker thing to do.

I would follow up with a story at the beginning of June, when Maine Senator Susan Collins, along with local stakeholders, stepped in to secure the funding restoration.

*

She kept going: "And our *Advanced Structures and Composites Center* had to lay off nine employees because the Department of Energy suspended three of our grants."

I can just see the suspension meeting happening at the *Department of Energy*. "Hey, Moe – how 'bout we suspend this one?" "Nah," Larry says: "This one will hurt a lot more," as he bops Curley on the head with a thick, already approved grant, causing three grants to be dropped on the floor. Curley replies: "Why I oughta...!" And Moe looks at the mess on the floor and says: "Hey, I gotta an idea, let's suspend all three grants!" "Nyuk-nyuk-nyuk!"

Chapter 51: The SIT Team Parallel

When I went to Pat's with Professor Thomason, she likened the behavior of the current administration to Nazism. She was specifically referring to the DOJ Special Investigation Team. As the Professor put it: "For some reason, this new investigatory team calls to mind the Geheime Staatspolizei, the state secret police of the Hitler administration."

When I got home after our afternoon at Pat's, I wanted to follow up on the Professor's analysis. I asked my AI assistant for more information on this secret police organization.

The answer was:

> *The Gestapo played a central role in the persecution of Jews, enforcing anti-Semitic laws and organizing deportations to concentration camps. It also targeted religious dissenters, trade unions, LGBTQ+ individuals, and student opposition, using torture and extrajudicial killings to suppress resistance.*

I'm not making this stuff up. I decided to look for some parallels. My AI assistant provided the analogies.

- ✓ The enforcement of laws that target a specific group of people.
- ✓ Deportations to camps, sort of, this generally applies to Hispanic people being sent to their home countries. Still, I wouldn't be surprised if members of the LGBTQ community were in the mix of Hispanics and other nationalities exported back to their home countries.
- ✓ Student opposition, sort of. The administration currently targets pro-Palestinian protestors. Could LGBTQ student rallies and opposition be subsequent?

- ✓ Quash Unions. It's just starting. POTUS has signed an executive order ending collective bargaining rights for many federal workers, particularly those in agencies related to national security. Those unions apparently raise national security concerns; therefore, they are prohibited from negotiating on behalf of employees in departments such as Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs. Will the automakers, if they don't start doing POTUS's bidding, be next?

What's missing in the similarities is the use of extrajudicial killings. I wonder, though, if the illegal deportation of immigrants to foreign prisons qualifies as an "extrajudicial killing." Could the immigrant deaths, which are surely going to take place due to prison crowding in foreign countries, qualify as "*involuntary manslaughter*?"

Chapter 52: Protest Activities

Mary and I spent April and the first week of May teaching our courses. We guided our classes through past presidencies, teaching them about the Constitution and how it can be manipulated, and showed how history has a tendency to repeat itself.

We were both surprised by the positive reactions we received. The supporters and non-supporters of the POTUS seemed to enjoy learning about how the current administration compares to previous administrations, how the Constitution works, what tariffs are all about, and how our trade policies are affecting global markets.

As we taught these courses, we learned what "worked" with our students and what didn't work. We honed our messages accordingly. After testing our messages on our classes, we then recorded our lectures at Alex's PCPTV studio.

Alex was going out of his way for us. He was finding us studio time; he was connecting us with sympathetic advocates; he was getting us covered in news segments. He would often attend some of the recording sessions, though only one for me. He attended all four of Mary's lectures. "He even took notes," Mary told me. "He says that he's learning a lot from me, and looks forward every week to attending my next lecture."

My reaction to Alex's kind gestures was one of deep appreciation. *He values my friendship and goes out of his way to prove it.*

I think we did a series of seven lectures. We distributed those lectures on YouTube and Vimeo. And we offered those lectures to the 50:50:1 and No Kings organizations for them to use as they saw fit. We also offered to speak at the events each organization was hosting.

*

In April, 50:50:1 sponsored two significant events: The April 5th "*Hands Off!*" protests, which were demonstrations opposing the POTUS administration's actions. The organization sponsored its "*National Day of Action*" on April 19th. That event called for defending democratic institutions and civil liberties, with rallies

again held in every state. Luckily for us, there were local demonstrations in Bangor near West Market Square and along the Penobscot Riverwalk. We met dozens of like-minded protesters at each event.

May opened with the "*National May Day Protests*." We had to travel down to Portland for that one because the organizers invited each of us to speak. The event featured coordinated marches, teach-ins, and union-led rallies, spotlighting concerns about labor exploitation, anti-immigrant policies, and threats to civil liberties. There were also several decentralized protests in various cities throughout Maine.

50:50:1 also sponsored "*Solidarity*" events that emphasized inter-group unity. One of those themes near-and-dear to our hearts was the academic freedom protests. Civil rights, immigrant advocacy, and labor groups also attended this event.

*

The "No Kings" movement in April was just getting off the ground. On April 19th, the "*We're Not Going Back*" protests were launched nationwide. We missed this one because we were at the 50:50:1 event in Bangor. This particular event marked the day the *American Revolution* began in 1775, and featured resistance to authoritarianism, often accompanied by reenactments, speeches, and sign-waving on bridges or in town centers. Before this event, there had been numerous decentralized "No Kings" protests nationwide. The key message at these events revolved around "no thrones, no crowns, no kings."

For the No Kings movement, May was a formative month. There were over 2,000 protests nationwide, held in all 50 states. The themes included protests against immigration policy, civil rights backtracking – including the rollback of Title IX — and protests against the use of military force in domestic matters. In Maine, dozens of communities participated. Mary and I went down to Portland, where thousands of people gathered in Lincoln Park. Chellie Pingree, one of our legislators in the U.S. House of Representatives, called our crowd "*a group of patriots*" and compared POTUS's actions to those of King George III.

*

The spring semester at the College of Maine concluded on May 2nd, with final exams held from May 5 to May 9. Mary and I completed our course load and were now free to concentrate all of our efforts on protests.

We had each spoken to select students about joining our protests, and several agreed to use social networking to reach out to their friends and other students to help form a student protest movement. We recruited a total of eighteen students to the cause.

*

I described our plan for student recruitment to organizers at both the 50:50:1 and No Kings rallies, and both organizations appreciated our idea for student participation. When I was ready to launch, they'd be there for me.

Our fervent hope was that our small group of students would create a mushroom effect, ultimately leading to thousands of new activists over time.

Chapter 53: My Email

We launched our social media initiative in mid-May. The College of Maine's administration immediately became aware of Mary's and my efforts in student recruitment. The Chancellor's office wasted no time, contacting me via email and requesting an explanation of my recruitment activities. They seemed "not thrilled." Apparently, recruiting students is "verboten." And thus began the comedy of errors that ultimately led to my eventual dismissal.

*

"She's asking for an account of my activities regarding our recruitment of students to join the protest movement," I said as I showed the Chancellor's email to Mary.

"We've done nothing wrong," Mary replied after reading the Chancellor's "*request for information*." "We're organizing students to express their First Amendment rights."

"Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly," I concurred. "And somehow, our attempts to organize students have put a real bee in her bonnet."

"So, what are you going to do?"

"Respond, of course. But the College of Maine is not going to like what I'm going to say. I'm going to ask for formal College support."

"Oh my. Show it to me before you send it," Mary requested. I think she knew that my dander was up and that something unpleasant was about to happen. And she always goes way out of her way to avoid conflicts.

*

Before I started writing my email response to Chancellor Claypool, I did the personal inventory drill that my father had taught me.

Who? The College of Maine;

What? I need the College to formally go on record as being opposed to several *executive orders imposed* on us by the current

administration. But, in truth, I wanted more than a statement of support from the College; I wanted activism. I wanted our students to "rise-up," to all become activists for the cause. We needed student numbers to help make an impact on POTUS's plans to deny civil rights to the LGBTQ+ community. And I wanted the College to become actively involved in helping to grow the number of student protesters. Over time, we will need students from every college and university to join our cause. The only way we're going to correct this out-of-control, renegade POTUS administration is by banding together in large numbers to make our positions known;

When? Now, obviously;

Where? At all college and university locations in Maine;

Why? Because it is morally and ethically the right thing to do;

How? First, a statement that describes why the College feels compelled to act on this protest matter. Second, a press release followed by a press conference to articulate the College's policy explicitly. Next, use the College's influence to persuade other colleges and universities to follow suit. And, finally, a commitment from the College to follow this course of action until human rights are extended to the immigrant population; until civil rights are restored to transgender individuals and other members of the LGBTQ+ communities; and until the government withdraws from efforts to undermine academic freedom.

*

To be honest, what I was really seeking was a repositioning of the College of Maine. I wanted it to become recognized as a beacon of light in this evolving, dark world of anti-DEI. I wanted our College to thumb its nose at the current POTUS administration, just as Janet Mills had done. I wanted the College to become a champion in defending the rights of lesbian, gays, bisexual, trans, queer, and all other sexual identifications and gender identities.

Having completed my preparation exercise, I was now ready to respond to the Chancellor's request for information regarding my recruitment activities. Here is what I wrote:

New Message

From: Oliver Thomason
To: Margaret Claypool, Chancellor, University of Maine
Cc:
Subject: Civil Rights at the University of Maine

Dear Chancellor Claypool:
Thankyou for expressing interest in my recruitment efforts to grow a student base of protestors against various policies of the current U.S. government Executive Branch.

In short, my efforts to date have been confined to recruiting students to use social media to locate and enlist other students to help grow the base of student protestors against various POTUS administration policies. I have not used University resources nor University venues in this endeavor. I have used my personal email account, various other social media platforms, and off-campus recording facilities to pursue my recruitment efforts.

On another note, given my personal situation as a member of a minority that is under attack (the LGBTQ+ community), I find myself questioning the University's position on protecting our civil rights. **Our University is a place of learning. If we're going to teach civil rights, let's defend them.**

I would like our University to become a beacon of hope that will actively fight the injustices of the current government administration. This administration is trampling our rights. I realize the risk the University of Maine will undertake protecting our freedoms; and I realize the financial precipice we will have to cross given the administration's propensity to punish dissenters, but we must to this. It is morally and ethically right. Plus, thanks to Governor Mills, we have already gained national attention in our fight for the right. Let's not lose that momentum.

We need to establish a firm position against the current administration's abuses. A clear policy on the University's position on DEI rights is called for, as is a press release and conference explaining our position.

I look forward to hearing your perspective on this matter.

Oliver Thomason
Professor of Political Science, UMaine

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I shared my email with Mary before I sent it, and she liked it. She felt I was clear in my request for action, and she liked that I explained how I went about recruiting without using College resources.

I thought my request was reasonable and straightforward. Needless to say, in today's highly politically charged environment, my email went over like a lead balloon. I received a callback from the Chancellor's office requesting a follow-up meeting. This meeting wasn't going to be pretty.

Chapter 54: The Chancellor Meeting

On the way over to the chancellor's office, a Tom Petty song kept repeating in my head: "*I Won't Back Down*." And I had no intention of backing down. It was time to put up or shut up.

*

The Chancellor wanted a "frank" conversation with me. She had also invited Sam McPhail, the president of the College of Maine, to join the meeting. Sam is not one of my favorites. I prefer to call him by a different name when I'm alone. To me, he's "Sam McFail-ure."

I knew what was coming my way; they were going to play good cop/bad cop with me, and hopefully get me to back down and withdraw my request. However, I knew that I would not back down; I was firmly committed to this course of protest action.

*

"So nice to see you," Chancellor Claypool greeted me as I entered her office.

"Likewise, for me, Margaret." I greeted her on a first-name basis. Not sure she liked that... "And it's good to see you, too, Sam," I said to the President of our College, the skinny, bespectacled, tall, gaunt, chiseled, hawk-faced McFailure standing off to my left.

Sam's role at this meeting was to play the role of the bad cop. And it didn't take him long to start the double team.

Smiling at me, Sam said, "It is probably appropriate that a political science professor has come forward to raise a red flag, given today's political environment. The government is moving against free speech, against the press, against civil rights, against unfavored corporations, against misbehaving states, and against educational institutions that don't support its mandates." He paused.

I could tell his lead-in was rehearsed.

"But I'm sure you've seen this all before in other political situations across history, am I right?" he rattled off.

I thought he was being "trite."

"I have, Sam," I agreed. "This pattern is a prelude to authoritarianism."

He knew that. Hell, everybody knows that.

"So then, you understand the risk involved in what you're proposing that we do. Huge fines for failure to comply with government directives; government interference in our curricula; loss of funding; and other dirty tricks – right?"

I thought to myself: *So, all they see is the punishment, not the reward of doing the right thing by standing up to a budding dictator. I know what happens when governments misbehave and move toward authoritarianism. I've studied this before, and I've watched it happen in other countries. And that's what is happening in the United States in the here-and-now.*

"I'm proposing that the College put some teeth into its commitment to civil rights, and show that we are willing to defend them. As for punitive government actions, I acknowledge that those things could happen," I said, and paused.

Sam took my pause to mean that it was time for him to state the obvious. "So, here's the thing, Olivia. If we do as you suggest, we're going to get in really big trouble. We will have our funds pulled. We could bankrupt this College. They might even find ways to hold us in criminal contempt. And, if those things happen, almost 12,000 students will see our doors shut. They will not be able to obtain their college diplomas in Maine unless they attend one of a number of other, prohibitively expensive private universities in Maine. Or they will have to go elsewhere, they'll have to transfer out of state to get a college or university education."

Wow, that was a mouthful, I thought. Definitely rehearsed.

"I understand, and I agree," I affirmed. But I thought to myself, 'Guess what happens if you don't take action now?'

"So, in view of the dire consequences, would you still have us stand up against an administration that has set out to wipe us off the face of the earth?" mealy-mouthed Sammy asked.

Sam should have known better than to phrase his "turning point" closure question as an open-ended question. I am a political science professor, after all. It was like being given a free kick in a soccer game with no goalie in the net. Okay, here goes...

"You know, Sam, when Hitler made his move against the Jews in the 1930s, they resisted in many ways. They held secret religious practices and clandestine prayer services; they ran underground libraries; they formed mutual aid societies to share food and resources. But several factors hampered stronger resistance. First, they lacked access to weapons. Second, the Nazis were swift with their systematic oppression, not unlike what we're seeing today under the current administration. Then there was hostility from their non-Jewish neighbors, the rest of the German population. The German people were starving, or just getting by, thanks to the punitive peace treaty their government had signed after World War I. So, they wanted someone to blame, a scapegoat. And Hitler gave them one, the Jews." I paused to let that sink in.

I continued: "But here's the one thing that really hurt them: they believed that their deportations were for the purpose of labor, not to be sent to death camps. They *disbelieved* what they were seeing: trainloads of Jews being taken to work camps. Their eyes deceived them. And they did not fully grasp the coming scale of Nazi atrocities. They did little, at the outset, to avoid the coming cataclysm." I paused again to let the Prez and the Chancellor absorb my point.

"They did little to nothing to resist the coming tyranny," I repeated. "I'm here today to, hopefully, persuade you not to make the same mistakes of the past. I am saying now is the time to take action, to take a position. All I'm asking is that the College declare its support of LGBTQ+ individuals, and that we make it clear that we're going to defend DEI rights."

*

That little diatribe altered the tone of the meeting.

"And if we do that, what will it lead us into. Campus protests and sit-ins, and or even other direct conflicts with the federal government?"

Damn-it, they figured out what I was really up to – my real motive in getting the College to take a stand on DEI rights. You can't just announce that you're in sympathy with the cause of civil rights for the LGBTQ+ community and then just walk away. Once you announce support for our civil liberties, you've got to put your money where your mouth is and do something. Once you've stated your anti-establishment position, protests, I knew, would follow. That was as sure as Maine camp roads turning into mud pits come spring.

Having been found, I chose to reiterate why taking a stand on our civil rights was not only necessary but also a pressing need. Maybe one last try to get them to see the light. I went back to my Jewish analogy.

"The missing element for the Jews in the late 1930s and 40s was their inability to stand-up as a *united people* and fight the injustices of the Nazi regime while they were happening. They were *afraid to organize mass protests*; *they failed to unite as a people to resist the Nazis. They didn't offer armed resistance. They were a passive people*; *they believed that eventually they would be safe*, *that cooler heads would prevail*. And they were wrong. Fatally wrong."

"So, what is it that you're suggesting?" Chancellor Margaret, the good cop, the placatory, asked.

"Have you listened to Senator Bernie Sanders lately?" I asked her.

"I have. You mean his '*Fighting Oligarchy Tour?*" she asked and thereby acknowledged that she had indeed heard what he had to say.

"Then you know that what he is saying is that the new administration is setting up an *oligarchy* – a wealthy class, and all the rest of us minions become chopped liver. During his speeches, he strongly encourages '*grassroots organization*' and '*union action*,' rather than encouraging insurrection or inciting violence. So, he stays away from the word 'protest.' However, he's indirectly telling us to protest and to do so regularly and vociferously. He advocates 'standing up against economic inequality and fighting for labor protections.' He's telling us to

organize, to unite, to find like-minded allies, and start protesting this government's behavior. That's the *American Way,* the way to change an unjust political landscape. Unite, protest, and peacefully drive for change in the government's behavior."

"What, are we in the Vietnam War protest era of the sixties?" Sam disapprovingly asked.

OMG, the dullard is persisting with his bad cop role. And he's our College president? I reacted in wonderment.

"Of course we are. We absolutely are. It was those protests that got the government to realize that the people did not want that war. There were riots, sing-ins, mass arrests – and peaceful resistance," I attempted to continue but was interrupted, again, by Sammy-boy.

"There were armed faceoffs during those conflicts," Sam argued. "And the most infamous took place in a *university setting*: *Kent State,* resulting in the deaths of four students. Nine others were wounded, with one suffering permanent paralysis. Is that what you want to have happen up here in Bangor?"

"Of course not, Sam. And you know as well as I do that Kent State was an aberration. Radical splinter groups also joined the protests. The *Weather Underground* engaged in bombings and violent actions against the government. But those were rarities. It was the way that we organized as a people that forced a change in the government's position. As our opposition grew, our public message reached the politicians, making it clear that we, in large numbers, did not want that war. That's what changed our political path back then," I insisted. "Numbers."

What I did not bring up was the topic of how the media constantly covered the brutality of that war. The media coverage contributed heavily to our exit from Vietnam. People were sickened and repulsed by the unnecessary violence and brutality of that war, and the useless loss of American lives. I didn't say this, but I thought it: *If we don't act quickly, I believe, we may lose the media as a means of protection. The current administration is out to curb freedom of speech and press rights. And if that happens, we're screwed.*

The good cop spoke up. "So, again, what is it exactly that you're suggesting that we do beyond stating our support for DEI?" She sought a clear plan of action.

*

I had given considerable thought to my plan of action and mapped it out using my father's 'who/what/when/where/why and how' method. So, I laid it out for her.

"First, prepare a narrative. In it, explain why the current administration is forcing our bastion of higher education to undertake actions of protest. Point out that they are asking us to violate the civil rights of other human beings. And make sure that the narrative delves into the low-life political moves they have undertaken to punish us."

Margaret was paying close attention. Sam must have had a pedicure appointment or something, because he looked like he was anxious to get out of the Chancellor's office.

"Second, find an influential partner. In fact, find ten influential partners. In fact, find a hundred influential partners. Get the whole college system to unite against government overreach and its clear vindictiveness. We all need to stand as one united force. Our buddy POTUS is currently sticking it to Harvard and Columbia. But pretty soon, there'll be ten, then twenty, then thirty universities targeted. We've got to create a *coalition of resistance*. We've got to be unified. Otherwise, eventually, they will make a run at rewriting our curriculum to reflect their ultra-conservative values."

I paused. Margaret understood what I was driving at. I would not only like the College to publicly state its support of DEI human rights, but I would also like us to organize with other Universities to present a united front against unlawful Executive Orders. Margaret encouraged me to continue. "Go on."

"Third, our system of checks and balances is broken. And the POTUS people know exactly how to exploit that broken system to their own advantage. We need to participate in government protests. We'll need to focus our protests on the U.S. Senate and the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS). The

senators are way smarter than those brown-nosed lackys in Congress. The Senators know that their cherished jobs and social standings are at stake, and that the American people will come after their cherished seats if this POTUS bullshit is allowed to continue. So, target them with protests; with mailing campaigns; with social media; with broadcast media – and any other way you can reach them. And show them that they will lose their ever-so-valuable Senate seats if they don't take the preventive action that the people of the "United" States want them to."

I paused. I think that they were considering my proposals, so I continued.

"As for SCOTUS, our land's highest court is currently and constantly being asked to overrule district court judges who aren't towing the POTUS immigration, education, and DEI mandates. SCOTUS needs to recognize that undermining the authority of district judges and consistently siding with the POTUS is making them appear like puppets, and the American people have taken note of this. SCOTUS needs to get the message that they represent us, not POTUS. So regular, peaceful, but huge protests on the Supreme Court steps are in order, including registering our disgust with SCOTUS decisions. The message to them should be: '*We know who you are, and we see what you're doing.*"

"Those are my immediate recommendations. Based on our successes, others will follow," I concluded.

Chapter 55: Lost Cause

I knew that I had failed to convince these College administrators to take aggressive action in defending human rights. Both the Chancellor and the President were displaying negative body language. Their arms were crossed, and they were avoiding eye contact. Skinny-boy's posture on the office couch was slouched.

The Chancellor was the first to speak. "So, you're asking the College to take a huge financial hit when the government pulls our funds, just to make a few points on the federal government's DEI policy. Is that correct?"

A few points? I was annoyed. Typical administrators and bean counters. They haven't grasped the gravity of the situation. But I kept myself under control. It was evident by her tone that they weren't going to follow any of my recommendations. They had made up their minds, probably even before our meeting, that taking federal money and falling in line with obscene government initiatives were more important than standing up on lofty principles such as *civil rights*. But they knew that I was independent enough to take other actions if they didn't try to placate me.

"Olivia," skinny-boy McFailure again spoke up, trying to take his last bad cop shot at me. "We can't take this risk. The education of twelve thousand students is at stake. The current administration has pissed-off so many constituents with its behavior and policies that the American people will overwhelmingly elect the opposing party in the mid-term elections. These problems will get fixed then and there."

I was not surprised by his statement. What I was asking was indeed a massive risk for the College to undertake. What he was telling me was that "*this, too, shall pass – sit back and wait this out – it will self-correct.*" This was precisely the attitude taken by the German Jewish community at the outset of World War II. Wait it out, things will change. They did not for millions of Jews.

What I was telling Sam was that this is an opportunity of a lifetime. It was an opportunity for our College to stand out from the rest, to take a leadership position in defending the rights of

people. To lead the way in civil rights protests. To practice what we preach. Plus, it's the right thing to do. The moral thing to do. If the College followed my suggestion, the College of Maine would forever be known as a defender of our Constitution, a leading College in the United States that was willing to stand up against tyranny and injustice when it really counted. Just take the risk, people...

Don't forget, leading a protest movement or taking a very active role would be beneficial for The College. After this dark cloud passes over and the new administration fails to exist, the College of Maine would have a new rank in the hierarchy of colleges and universities in the United States. We'd be known as a thought leader willing to risk everything to do the right thing.

Chapter 56: To the Board

It was at this point that Margaret finally spoke up. And much to my surprise, she said: "I've been considering your comments and suggestions. This is not my lone decision. I will need to take this proposal to the *Board of Trustees*."

I couldn't believe my ears. Instead of flushing my proposals, she wanted to escalate them and let the Board decide on what to do. I was all for that, although I was certain that she and Sam would argue that by committing to my course of action, the College would necessarily become involved in a protest movement. I wasn't sure how that would play out at the board level.

On the plus side, the Board consists of sixteen members, fifteen of whom were appointed by our Governor and approved by the Maine Legislature. So, given what happened to our Governor at the POTUS meeting, the lion's share of the Board members should be sympathetic to my cause.

"I need you to write-up your suggestions, complete with the Nazi analogies, and return them to me ASAP. The board meets in two weeks. I'll take it before them and see what they have to say," Margaret promised.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," I said, grateful for this opportunity. At least she would give my suggestions a shot at approval. What this meant to me, however, was that I'd better come up with an irresistible, compelling case to drive the College to action. I would do as she asked, I would submit a proposal, a call-to-action, that will get the College to embrace my "challenge the government" position.

Chapter 57: Above Board?

I had the distinct feeling that, when I left the Chancellor's office, I was being set up. Yes, I had an assignment to build a solid case that would compel the Board to take action on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community. And "yes," I could create such a compelling document. But would I get a fair hearing at the board meeting? Those are closed meetings, so I would not be able to attend nor present.

What were the chances that the Board would approve my proposal? My guess: slim to none. But at least, one way or another, we'd have an official College position on my transgender civil rights matter. The College would either stand up and do the right thing or choose to leave itself to the whims of the current administration.

My mind wandered back to Colonel Jessup's diatribe in the movie "*A Few Good Men.*" In one scene, the Colonel described how his troops protect democracy. He tells a prosecuting attorney, deliberately, in no uncertain terms, that *we live in a world that has walls; those walls must be guarded*; and that's what his men do. He then challenges the prosecuting attorneys on whether *they* would be willing to protect those walls. Without waiting for an answer, Colonel Jessup forcefully claims that the attorneys and everyone else in that room, and in America, "*want his people on that wall*" to protect democracy. He argues that America *needs his people on that wall.* In other words, somebody was going to have to stand up to defend democracy.

Would Maine help guard the wall that protects democracy, or would Maine leave it to someone else to help guard that wall?

Chapter 58: "My Modest Proposal"

In 1729, Irish author Jonathan Swift wrote "*A Modest Proposal*," a satirical essay that proposed an outrageous solution to Ireland's poverty problem at the time. He proposed *selling children as a food source*, using, literally, 'kid meals' as a means to feed the populace. He intended to highlight the cruel attitudes of the gentry toward the poor at the time.

As I wrote my proposal, I pondered writing it as a satirical essay. As such, I would propose that the College of Maine *sell its students* to the federal government for a "*reeducation*" price. That way, the College could make a lot of money, and think about it, let's say ten thousand dollars a head, times twelve thousand students:

12,000 students X $10,000 = $ 120,000,000!

It's a staggering sum; the College's coffers would be full to the brim.

Meanwhile, the government could teach those students to resist liberal ideas, to embrace America First policies, such as economic protectionism, and to be skeptical of international institutions. It could indoctrinate those students in American nationalism and instill in them the MAGA version of patriotism. The government would be free to teach students divisive messages of hate, such as: "We hate foreigners; we hate immigrants; we hate people of color; we hate LGBTQ+ people; and so on. The end result would be an ideal batch of students, full believers in MAGA values and the MAGA way of life...

I chose not to use a satirical approach. The board might think that indoctrinating students might be a good idea...

*

It took me four days to articulate my compelling proposal for College involvement in protests to safeguard DEI rights. My plan called for a public commitment from the College of Maine to protect the civil rights of others.

*

In my proposal, I requested that the Board permit me to hold a series of organized student rallies and protests on college grounds. I asked for College of Maine administrative support in organizing a united front with other like-minded schools that are willing to lend their support in protesting various policies of the current administration. In other words, I was asking the University to become active in the protest movement. That was a big ask, but it was the morally correct thing to do.

*

Margaret Claypool did as she had promised. She called all sixteen members of the *Board of Trustees* and informed them of the situation. She then forwarded copies of my proposal to each one of them. She was true to her word; she had at least given my proposal a chance to be evaluated by the Board.

The big question now on the table was: "Would we choose the path of least resistance, the safe path, the no-risk path, the wrong path and not move to protest vindictive tyranny?"

The jury was out.

Chapter 59: Being Don Quixote

The morning after I submitted my proposal to the College, I lay in bed half-awake, caught in that hazy space where dreams and daylight overlap. As usual, a song was already looping in my head. All week it had been a bizarre jukebox: "*Funkytown*," the Beatles' "*Birthday*," even Postmodern Jukebox's jazz take on "*All About That Bass*." These songs arrive without warning, these mental soundtracks — no logic, no pattern, just some mysterious echo from the night before.

But that morning, something different surfaced: music from *Man of La Mancha*. More specifically, "*The Impossible Dream*." I stayed under the covers — the room was as cold as ice — and let the lyrics drift back to me.

"*To dream the impossible dream... to fight the unbeatable foe...*"

The timing was almost too on the nose.

I started replaying the story in my mind. Don Quixote, devourer of tales about knights and chivalry, finally convinces himself he is one. He sets out to right the world's wrongs, armed with nothing but conviction and a wildly generous imagination. At his side trudges Sancho Panza, his loyal and practical accomplice. And then there's Aldonza, the weary peasant girl he insists on seeing as the noble Dulcinea — his ideal, his inspiration, the one to whom he dedicates every act of "valor."

He is, of course, delusional.

And I couldn't help wondering: in my own quest — our protest — am I a Don Quixote? I saw myself as a modern Don Quixote, tilting at the windmills of bureaucracy and injustice. Alex became my Sancho, steady and supportive. And Mary — Mary was unmistakably my Dulcinea. Not because she needed rescuing, but because she had become the quiet force behind my courage. She listened. She challenged me. She helped shape my ideas. She stood beside me without hesitation.

She was my pillar, my partner in this strange, chivalrous crusade.

And then, as if on cue, the song surged back into my head —

"*To dream the impossible dream... To fight the unbeatable foe*" —followed by the line that hit me hardest: *"To run where the brave dare not go..."*

Chapter 60: Maine Wins!

I'd misjudged the timeline by about a week. I'd expected the courts to swat down the flimsy federal cases against Maine quickly, but the real break came on Friday, May 2nd. That's when the Department of Agriculture abruptly abandoned its proceedings. The threat to withhold school nutrition funds — one of the administration's more cynical pressure tactics — was finally over. The money would flow again.

Maine, in turn, agreed to withdraw its lawsuit. Technically, it was a settlement; practically, it was a retreat by the federal government.

And the stakes had been enormous. In its complaint, Maine's Attorney General noted that the state's child nutrition program was owed $1.8 million for the current year, with another $3 million expected the next. For a state that isn't exactly swimming in cash, that's no small sum.

*

So yes — we won. But the victory was incomplete. The underlying issue, the one that started this whole mess — whether transgender girls can compete in girls' sports — remained unresolved. That's why I kept pushing the College to take a principled stand on LGBTQ+ civil rights. The sports debate had become a smokescreen, a distraction from the real crisis: a coordinated effort to strip civil rights from an already vulnerable community.

Until that truth was front and center, none of us could afford to stop.

Chapter 61: The Cat Gets Out of the Bag

The board meeting had been scheduled for May 19th — only a few days away. My plan was supposed to have been kept *confidential*. Board members who received it were not to share it with ANYONE. It was a confidential report that was to be kept hush-hush.

But then the unthinkable happened: SOMEBODY LEAKED MY PROPOSAL TO THE BOARD TO THE RIGHT-WING PRESS!

It became readily apparent that we had a saboteur on the board. Someone who did not like the idea of the school becoming involved in the fight for DEI rights. My guess was that it was a possible hidden POTUS freak. It had to be one of the members of the *Board of Trustees* or someone at the State House who had surreptitiously gained access to my proposal.

Now the cat was out of the bag. Negative publicity was to follow. Could the damage be controlled?

Chapter 62: The Talk Show

The proud recipient of my confidential proposal was a right-leaning Rush Limbaugh-like conservative:

> *"In Maine today, a plan has been discovered that seeks to undermine the federal government. It calls for riotous protests against the Senate and the Supreme Court of the United States. The author, a political professor at the College of Maine, is a trans-woman! He wants all of the progress that our government has made over the past hundred days to be torn down. He wants our government agencies to return to the bloated institutions they have long been. He wants immigrants 'rights' restored, even though these immigrants don't have any rights because they are illegal aliens! He wants that left-leaning Department of Education to be protected. He also probably wants abortions to return. These are exactly the type of un-American people we don't want or need in this country. Perhaps he, too, could be 'deported' to Guantanamo Bay or Alcatraz."*

The broadcaster shifted gears. "Audience, I'm interested in your reaction, the lines are open for your feedback..."

*

It didn't say anything about immigration and abortion in my proposal. I had only discussed the need to organize protests and the ways to do so. This guy is a liar!

I continued to listen to this series of false accusations from the right-wing broadcaster. I said nothing about restoring the *Department of Education*, though I agree it should remain intact. Look at how Florida is banning books it doesn't like – including books by Maine's most famous author and international sensation, Steven King. Those people are loonies down there; no wonder everybody is abandoning their state. They remind me of

the book-burners during the Nazi regime. They're message is: "*You can only read the books that we approve of that deliver messages that we approve of.*"

The current administration also wants strict censorship policies regarding books at U.S. military schools – books on gender ideology, racial indoctrination, and diversity have been removed or slated for removal. This book-banning administration reminds me of the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance* in fundamentalist Iran.

And, as for abortion, just for the record, I believe that women should have the right to control their own bodies. Just because YOU have a religious belief that abortion is bad is not a license to control other people's bodies. That's YOUR religion, and we're supposed to have freedom of religion in the United States, which means that I should not have to abide by your religious beliefs. Our bodies, ourselves...

*

"We have our first caller, the broadcaster, now show host announced. "Please go ahead."

> *"Those people in Maine are backwoods, inbred, backwards morons. Uneducated, contrary, and most are liberals. And they have insulted our President. And now they want to organize a revolt against our country? Send in the troops and weed them out, I say," the first caller opened.*
>
> *"Well, sir, it's not all of the people in Maine, it's their intelligentsia. Their college institutions. They teach this kind of revolution and protest stuff up there. It's their schooling that needs to be 'adjusted.' They need to get on board with the new America, the America with jobs, wealth and prosperity for all."*
>
> *"Amen to that," the caller replied. "So how do we go about straightening out this situation?" the caller asked.*

"Well, I can think of a couple of things," the host volunteered. "First, they need to be reeducated. They need the curriculum they teach in their schools to be changed. They need to understand the great things our President and his people have done so far, and the great things that are comin' down the pike."

The host paused to consider what else would need to be done to 'reeducate' Maine. He then continued:

"Next, the President needs to halt their federal funding. I don't mean just for the trans-women issue that they support, but for everything. Maine needs to be reminded how much it depends on the good ole' United States federal government in order to remain afloat."

The host paused to consider other punitive measures that could be used to compel the state of Maine into compliance. No others came to mind immediately.

"And if those two measures don't work, the ban on federal funding should be continued until the relent. And they will relent."

The first caller thanked the host for his insights into the "*Maine Situation*," opening the stage for the second caller. The host greeted him with "*Welcome to the show. And what is your opinion of this Maine Situation?"*

Caller two responded with a few observations and then a question.

"First, I want to observe that Harris got more votes in Maine than our President got. It was close, though, I just looked it up. Harris received fifty-two percent of the vote, while the President garnered forty-five percent. To me, this means that almost every other person in Maine voted for the President. This shows me that almost half

the state favors our Make America Great Again policies."

The host replied:

"That sounds like a reasonable assumption."

The caller continued:

"So given that almost half of the state supports our President, what do we do with the other half – how do we educate them on the benefits of getting rid of foreigners; on stopping voter fraud, on protecting families by eliminating abortion across the entire country; on streamlining government by getting rid of government bloat and useless regulations; and by clamping down on the 'rights' of these gender idiots and homosexuals?"

The host agreed.

Well, sir, you're preaching to the choir on those observations. "I've taken notes, so let's go through your list one at a time, starting with immigration.

The caller urged the host on.

Please do.

The host obliged.

Well, so those liberals up in Maine are probably ready to fight mass deportations. But the conservatives, like us, know that those people are stealing our jobs, working for less money. I'm betting the conservatives up in Maine are thrilled about the President's mass deportation policies, but the liberals are not. So, to win over the liberals, we have to show them that we are

deporting the thieves, rapist, and murders who have come into our country.

*

Where do they get these people? I thought. This guy knows nothing about Maine. Yes, contractors don't much appreciate the competition they get from illegal immigrants. On the other hand, they're the ones employing them because they work for pennies on the dollar. And what about our blueberry fields? American workers don't and won't pick blueberries. It's backbreaking work because you're bent over all day long, and you have to pick about two hundred blueberries to fill a carton. And the pay is lousy. So, should we let our blueberry fields lie fallow because we can't find workers to help with the harvest?

*

The second caller concurred:

Many support the illegal aliens in our midst. I used to live up in Belfast, and my buddies up there claim that the immigrants are taking their housing because they're getting prioritized over long-term Maine residents who are having affordability issues. There's a real housing shortage in Maine. Our people should not be second-class citizens to a bunch of hoodlum illegal aliens."

The host agreed. And then the second caller added to his previous statement.

And when will those damn people learn to speak English?" the second caller continued. "English is our language here in the United States, not Spanish. Comprende?

The host helped belittle Spanish speakers.

Tell me about it. For English, stay on the line; for Español, press número dos...

The caller and the host got a kick out of that one. The host continued:

Okay, next issue, voter fraud. They are, most likely, hoping for voter ID laws, just like we are. They, like the rest of us, probably want stricter voting requirements in order to ensure election integrity. Who doesn't?

*

That conclusion is what's called an "assumptive close." You make a statement, your listener doesn't challenge that statement, so you assume that the listener approves of your argument. However, consider this: requiring additional identification might exclude some people from the voting system. And it's those voters that the administration is targeting, because they are more likely to vote for the opposition.

Note that despite some objections from those nutcase election deniers, there has never been any proof that voter fraud has taken place in Maine. NEVER!

*

Next on your list is protecting families. And let me quote the Bible on this one as it relates to abortion, which is a family issue. It comes from Exodus 20:13, which says, 'You shall not murder.' 'Nuff said.

The caller added:

Amen to that!

What, are we at a bible meeting now? I wondered. I no longer go to church, the congregation and the pastors don't seem to like my "gender." I don't feel welcome amidst the great, clean masses of

heterosexual people in my local church. They should know better, but they don't.

*

Your fourth point was about government bloat. New Englanders are pretty tight-fisted, so I don't think you'd get any pushback from Maine on cutting government spending.

And on your final point, which I believe was: "What should be done to get them to admit that there are only two sexes, male and female? And I think that work is already being done. The governor of Maine and the President have locked horns on this issue, with Maine showing support for the LGBTQ community. With continued federal pressure, I'm sure the President will convince the people of Maine to fall in line with the mainstream, to join our flock.

Flock? Flock? Ah, the good ole' sheep and shepherd comparison. I have always hated the suggestion that we are all brainless sheep and must follow a shepherd. Baaaaaaahhhhhaaaaa.

Caller two thanked the host for his "engaging" conversation, and a third caller joined the conversation.

Welcome to the show. And what would you like to discuss today?"

The new caller asked:

Well, I just wanted to know if you've ever been to Maine?

The host started to answer, but the connection mysteriously went dead.

Sorry about that, folks. We're experiencing technical difficulties. On to the next caller.

Caller four came on the line.

> *So, I was thinking, is there a way to get rid of Maine's petulant governor and get someone better qualified into that position?*

And the show kept droning on, and on, and on...

Chapter 63: The Decision of the Board

I was summoned to the Chancellor's office after the leak — never a good omen. Inside, Margaret waited with pointy-faced, bespectacled nerd-boy himself, Sam McPhail. We exchanged the kind of brittle pleasantries people use when everyone already knows why they're in the room.

Once we sat, Margaret delivered the verdict with the solemnity of a funeral announcement: "We're sorry to inform you that the Board has rejected your proposed plan. It was a noble cause, nobly played — but forces beyond our control prohibit further action."

To me, it sounded like something straight out of Orwell. In 1984, rebellion collapses under the weight of an all-powerful regime. Was that what we were doing now — crossing the line from resistance to submission? The Board had decided to lie down, belly-up, ready to accept whatever indignities the administration chose to heap on us after our surrender. I could already feel the reprisals forming in the minds of the POTUS squad: We'll teach them a lesson.

I'd known this rejection was coming, but McPhail still had to perform his little disciplinary flourish. "Given what has happened so far, let's not risk any more exposure to the College in this pursuit." A statement on the surface, a threat underneath. The unspoken clause hung in the air: "*Or you'll be looking for work elsewhere*."

I smiled. "I understand." Maybe it sounded polite. Maybe it sounded sarcastic. Hard to tell. But it was my coded way of saying exactly what I meant: GFY. They wanted brief and submissive. They got brief. Submissive was never on the table.

*

With the unwanted publicity swirling around the leaked plan, the Board's rejection was inevitable. The hate mail from alumni and the "inbred, no-front-teeth Mainers" didn't help either. The whole thing had become a hot potato, and the Board's instinct was to drop it before it scorched their hands.

Margaret later told me the Board's official reasoning: they didn't want to jeopardize the education of nearly 12,000 College of Maine students. A noble sentiment, if you didn't look too closely. In practice, it meant the College wasn't willing to put its money — or its reputation — behind the civil rights it claimed to teach as foundational human values.

Teach civil rights? Absolutely. Practice them? That was apparently someone else's job.

*

Then a darker thought crept in. Maybe this wasn't just fear of political backlash. Maybe The College of Maine didn't want to be the lightning rod for defending LGBTQ+ civil rights. We all know the social "stigma" that comes with supporting our community. If the haters didn't want the College involved in our protests, did the College decide it didn't want the stigma of being labeled LGBTQ+ supporters? LGBTQ+ lovers? The "queer-lover" school?

It wasn't paranoia if the pattern fit. And it fit a little too well.

Chapter 64: The Navy Quotes

On the bright side, the College didn't fire me. They simply dangled enough frustration in front of me that I'd eventually fire myself. And I would — posthaste. It was only a matter of time before I said sayonara to this parade of hypocrites.

*

Walking back to my office, my mind drifted to John Paul Jones, the Continental Navy captain who refused to surrender even as the HMS Serapis pounded his ship to splinters. When the British captain asked if he wished to strike his colors, Jones famously replied, "I have not yet begun to fight!" Then — against all odds — he won the remaining battle.

Maybe I could borrow a little of that spirit.

*

Mary was waiting in my office when I returned.

"Well?" she asked, eyes bright with a hope we both knew was unrealistic. Even before the meeting, we'd understood the odds. The Board was never going to risk the wrath of the federal government.

"As expected," I said. "They're not willing to take the chance."

"So... do we move ahead with your student recruitment plan?"

"Absolutely. I'll tell our student advocates the College rejected the proposal. Then they'll reach out to their counterparts at other colleges and universities. We build the resistance from the ground up. Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead."

I heard myself and winced. Now I was quoting Admiral Farragut at the Battle of Mobile Bay. A moment earlier it had been John Paul Jones. I could just as easily have gone with Captain James Lawrence's "Don't give up the ship" from the War of 1812.

What was with me and all the patriotic naval battle quotes today?

Still... wouldn't it have been fantastic if trumpets had blared—da, dada, daaa — every time I delivered one? But no. No trumpets. Just me, Mary, and the quiet resolve to keep fighting.

Chapter 65: Determined and Committed

I was nervous for Mary. I looked her straight in the eyes.

"Mary, I'm not sure you should come along for this ride. Once I launch the recruiting plan, the College will fire me. You can bet Sam McPhail will 'discover' that I violated policies, breached academic integrity, and failed to comply with institutional guidelines. That's the kind of miserable little zit of a man he is."

I took a breath.

"If you join me, you'll get fired too. And I don't want that. This is something I need to do alone."

Mary didn't even blink.

"Oh no you don't," she said, grinning. "In for a penny, in for a pound." Now she was doing the quote thing. "We're taking this ride together," she insisted.

"Mary, NO. This will wreck your career. I'm old and ready to retire—assuming the POTUS crew doesn't yank my Social Security in retaliation. But you've got twenty years of teaching ahead of you. I can't let you board this sinking ship."

There it was — another naval analogy. What was wrong with me?

"You're dreaming if you think you can stop me," she said, her voice firm. "If we both get fired, we keep fighting until we run out of fight. Then we'll head Down East, find a place on the water, and I'll write books. You, meanwhile, can get a job at McDonald's — if they hire people your age."

*

She's always teasing me about my "advanced age." It's affectionate, never cruel. But what she'd just said — "We'll head Down East, find a place on the water" — that landed differently. It was a promise, a vision of a shared future. She wanted me in her life through thick and thin. She was willing to risk everything to stand beside me.

I felt a rush of warmth, gratitude, exhilaration. She had just shown me the depth of our friendship. How could I possibly say no?

*

"Mary... are you sure? Things are about to get really ugly. Are you sure you want to risk everything to join me in this mad plan?"

"Olivia," she said, looking at me with a sincerity that hit me square in the chest, "I'd follow you to the ends of the earth. I'm on board. *Now stop lollygagging and let's get this show on the road.*"

Another idiom? What ever I was having in the quotes department was apparently catching. I prayed our conversation wasn't about to devolve into an endless parade of idioms — but at this point, I was too moved to care.

Chapter 66: The Final Straw

I sent Mary off to rally her students, urging them to start contacting their counterparts at other schools. I planned to do the same. If luck was on our side, this scattershot approach might snowball into tens of thousands of students joining the protest. And if that happened, we'd be responsible for adding a massive wave of young voices to the June 14th demonstration.

Part of me wondered what would happen if we branded it the "*Spring Break Protest.*" Students would show up in droves. They always do when you give them a name that sounds like a party.

After firing off my emails and texts, I turned to the next step: reaching out to Alex.

*

Alex already knew all about my so-called "secession" plan — the label right-wing broadcasters had gleefully slapped on my proposal. It had dominated local chatter for a week straight.

"Alex," I began, "I'm about to give you an exclusive update on my protest plan. I'm pretty sure doing this will get me fired, since I've been warned not to create any more 'negative publicity' for the College. And you know what? I don't care. I'm moving forward with my protest against the federal government's violation of my human rights. Do you want the story of how two Maine professors are carrying the battle forward?"

There was a pause on the line.

"Wait," Alex said, suddenly uneasy. "If I do this interview... you'll be fired?"

"Indeed," I replied. "And I'll be happy to be free to pursue my protest plans."

"Olivia, I don't want to get you fired."

"It's already a fait accompli. I'm leaving. So, if you want my parting interview from my office at the College, you'd better hustle over here."

Another pause — then a resolve. “My video crew and I will be right there.”

Chapter XX: Alex Meets Mary

Alex is the kind of interviewer who thrives on structure. He maps out his story before he ever turns on a camera, lining up his questions in a neat, logical flow. It’s his superpower — and his Achilles’ heel.

He arrived at my office about thirty minutes after I called, videography team in tow. We exchanged quick greetings; there was no time for small talk. If Alex wanted to break this story first, he had to move fast. The news cycle waits for no one, and the five-o’clock broadcast window was already looming.

So, without ceremony, we launched into the interview.

“Professor Thomason,” Alex began, “you’ve been accused of organizing a revolt against the POTUS administration. Would you like to clarify your position?”

“My position is this,” I said. “Our civil rights are under attack by the current administration, and I’m not going to stand for it any longer.”

*

A voice cut in from the doorway.

“ *We’re* not going to stand for it any longer.”

It came from Mary. She’d finished sending her messages and had come to update me — walking straight into the middle of Alex’s interview. His carefully constructed flow shattered on impact.

Alex blinked, confused. *Who was this stunning woman barging into his shot? And why was she speaking in our interview?*

“Stop recording,” he told his crew. Then, to me: “Olivia?”

*

“Alex, this is my associate and close friend, Assistant Professor of History, Mary Shelley.”

Alex did a double-take. “The Mary Shelley? The one you talk about endlessly?”

“The one and the same,” Mary said with a smile. I could’ve sworn she tossed her hair — nerves, discomfort, or a little flirtation, I couldn’t tell.

Alex’s irritation evaporated instantly. He shook her hand. “A pleasure to meet you. I’d love to chat more, but we’re under a time crunch. I need to get this interview online ASAP.”

Mary ignored the hint. “Did Olivia mention we’re in this together? That we’re jointly organizing the protests?” It wasn’t a question. It was a declaration.

Alex looked at me. “She said you were helping, so I assumed Olivia was the primary and you were assisting quietly.”

I opened my mouth to clarify, but Mary cut me off.

“We agreed this was a joint effort,” she said sharply.

“I know, Mary,” I said, half-apologetic. “But everything is moving fast. I wanted to get the news out.”

“Olivia,” she said, firm and unyielding, “we’re doing this — together.”

*

Alex watched our exchange while checking his phone every few seconds. Time was slipping away.

“Well,” he said, “if that’s settled, I’d like to continue. And if it’s alright with you, Olivia, I’d like to include Ms. Shelley.”

Mary’s expression made it clear what my answer needed to be.

“Of course,” I said. Though inside, I knew this was the moment she crossed the line — the moment the College would come for her too.

“How do you want her positioned?” I asked Alex. “What should she say?”

“I want to show how the two of you are moving forward with your student recruitment plan,” he said. His crew miked Mary and

seated her across from my desk. “Olivia, stay behind your desk and look professorial. Mary, look like you’re in the middle of a planning session. I’ll use the same questions I prepared for Olivia. Jump in whenever you want.”

What I didn’t know was that Alex had an ulterior motive. He wanted Mary in the story because she was, frankly, a magnet for viewers. And Mary — well, Mary is a showstopper.

Alex restarted the interview.

*

“This is Professor Olivia Thomason and her co-partner, Associate Professor Mary Shelley,” he began. “We’re here in Professor Thomason’s office at the College of Maine.”

He continued, “Last week, there was quite a ruckus over your plans to organize protests against the federal government regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion rights. You presented a proposal to the College. What did they say?”

“I was told just over an hour ago,” I said, “that the College’s main reason for rejecting our proposal was fear of jeopardizing the education of nearly 12,000 students. In short, they fear repercussions if they take a stand.”

“Assistant Professor Shelley, anything to add?”

Mary nodded. “I’ve known Professor Thomason for several years. His intentions are honorable. Although the College won’t support our protests, she and I are launching a social-networking plan to recruit students nationwide to join us and help restore our civil rights.”

“Associate Professor Shelley,” Alex said, “You teach history. Have you ever seen a presidency like this before?”

“Yes and yes,” she replied. “I have seen parallels — scandals, gerrymandering, civil-rights violations, cronyism, corruption. But never all at once.”

I winced internally. Gerrymandering and cronyism weren’t exactly words that resonated with the average viewer. I’d have to teach her the art of the soundbite.

"That's a serious accusation," Alex said. "Can you back it up?"

"Every word," Mary said. "I even teach a class on it."

"Sign me up," Alex said, then pivoted back to me. "Professor Thomason, how will you launch your social-media campaign?"

"I'm contacting my former students," I began — then corrected myself. "We are contacting LGBTQ organizations, and given the civil-rights issues affecting people of color, we'll also reach out to the NAACP. We're enlisting international LGBTQ groups as well. But social media will be our engine. That's how we'll organize peaceful protests and sustained resistance until this President changes course."

Nice soundbite, Alex thought. I could see it on his face.

"Well, there you have it," he said. "Two professors organizing a major protest campaign, using students to drive a national social-media movement challenging the federal administration. Professors, may we track your progress?"

"Absolutely," I said. "We're confident our movement will succeed and send a clear message: *back off*. We in the LGBTQ+ community are Americans, and we will not be steamrolled by government interference."

Alex ended the interview, grinning.

"Great soundbites," he said. "You're going to get a lot of attention. I can see the headline now: Professors Stand Up to POTUS Administration, Vow Major Protests to Defend DEI. You two are about to become celebrities."

*

Alex paused and turned to Mary. "Assistant Professor Shelley, I meant what I said earlier — I'd love to take your course. Comparative presidencies? That's right up my alley. Could you send me a syllabus and point me to the readings?"

"I can do better than that," Mary said. "I just gave my comparative presidents lecture. It's fresh. I can walk you through it — we just need a time and place."

“That would be incredibly useful for future stories,” Alex replied. But his attention was already drifting toward the clock. He had enough material to build his segment, and the deadline was breathing down his neck. He thanked us both, gathered his team, and headed for the door.

But before leaving, he turned back, pointed at us, and said, “Saturday. Four o’clock. Bring your lecture. Be there!” Then he vanished down the hallway like a man sprinting toward a finish line only he could see.

*

After he left, Mary looked puzzled. Then we both burst out laughing.

“Be where?” she asked, still chuckling at Alex’s dramatic exit.

“Pat’s Pizza,” I said. “Obviously.”

“Is he always like that?” she asked. “Always so...” She paused, searching for the right word. “Discombobulated?”

“Not always,” I said. “Only when he’s on deadline. Or when he thinks he has an exclusive.”

Mary considered this. “Should I meet him at Pat’s on Saturday?”

“You mean, should we meet him?” I corrected.

“Touche,” she said, catching the emphasis immediately.

“And yes — we should go. It’ll give you two a chance to get better acquainted. And if he likes what he hears, we’ll have plenty of opportunities to update him on our progress. So, if you’re free, let’s go to Pat’s.”

“All right then,” Mary said. “Pat’s it is.”

*

He is intense, Mary thought. And exactly as Olivia had described him — tall, handsome, engaging, sharp, and genuinely interested in her lecture.

Pat’s Pizza, here I come...

Chapter 67: Bye-Bye Miss American Pie

Don McLean used to sing a song called "*Bye-bye, Miss American Pie*," which was about the end of an era in music, but also about a change in American values. "Miss American Pie" was a symbol of traditional American values or the American Dream. Saying goodbye to her represented a farewell to those ideals as the country entered a more turbulent and uncertain era.

For some reason, after our interview with Alex, I couldn't get that song out of my head.

*

About a week after our interview "aired" on the Internet, both Mary and I got fired. I had been verbally warned to discontinue my student protest movement, and Sam had followed that warning with a written warning. I, of course, disregarded that warning. The reason the College let me go was that I had been "insubordinate and disrespectful of College policy."

After the PCPTV interview, Mary was warned in writing to cease and desist all activity regarding news programs promoting our protest movement. She, instead, did another interview with Alex, warranting a warning from Sam that she was "bordering on insubordination."

"I have never been so insulted in my life," Mary had responded. "Us Shelley's don 'border' on anything!" She had thus affirmed her insubordination, which warranted her dismissal.

I thought my response to my firing was a bit less personal, a bit more on point. "It's a shame that my career at the College has come to an end, but at least I'm doing the morally correct thing."

Strangely, after I was fired, the McLean song "Bye Bye Miss American Pie" wouldn't stop playing in my head.

*

Now that we were unemployed, at least we would have plenty of time to work on our pet project: *the Protest*.

Before we left our offices, Mary and I had compiled contact information for students that we believed would be sympathetic to

our cause. We copied those contact names to USB drives such that we could send out blanket emails describing what was happening and seek their support. I had a list of students from my classes who I knew would support my rally idea. And I had a list of alumni and former students whom I knew would jump on board. Mary had compiled her own list of sympathizers. Fearing legal problems, we did not send our requests for support out over the College of Maine network. We used our own personal home accounts when we started up.

Chapter 68: Off to the Races!

You should have seen how fast the idea caught fire. One spark — that's all it took. Within days, it was racing from campus to campus like a brushfire in August. Students volunteered in droves, both mine and Mary's, eager to organize rallies, spread the word, and build the movement. Email, social media, *YouTube*, *TikTok*, *Instagram*, *Snapchat*, *Discord* — every digital platform became a megaphone. New England colleges lit up with activity, and it wasn't long before mainstream media caught the scent.

"Look at what two fired college professors are doing..."

That was the headline. And honestly? It wasn't wrong.

Mary had the brilliant idea to launch a *GoFundMe.* The donations poured in — not from students, but from ordinary people terrified of losing DEI and LGBTQ+ protections. Then the big players noticed. The largest LGBTQ+ advocacy group in the country reached out, offering help with messaging and access to their massive supporter database. An LGBTQ+ political funding organization joined in too. They usually backed candidates, not protests, but they saw our fight as part of the same struggle and offered organizational support.

International LGBTQ+ groups joined the effort. Other organizations stepped in to help manage donations, coordinate logistics, and streamline communication. Suddenly, we weren't just two professors with a plan — we were the nucleus of a national movement.

With the donations, we hired bus companies for April and May to ferry students to protest sites. We printed thousands of signs:

WE ARE YOUR FELLOW HUMANS

PLEASE HELP PROTECT OUR CIVIL RIGHTS

*

Mary, the historian, had the perfect stroke of genius. She remembered the Revolutionary War flag — the coiled rattlesnake on a yellow field, emblazoned with DON'T TREAD ON ME.

It was ideal.

The flag had originally symbolized unity and resistance against tyranny. Now, here we were, fighting our own version of a revolutionary struggle — not with muskets, but with students, social media, and the demand for restored DEI rights. Mary pointed out that over time, the flag had evolved into a broader emblem of individual liberty, resistance to oppression, and opposition to authoritarian overreach.

It was perfect for our cause.

We ordered a hundred of them. And when those flags began appearing in the hands of our student protesters — bright yellow, bold, defiant — it felt like history itself had decided to march with us.

Chapter 69: Cohabitation

The topic was bound to surface eventually, and now it had: the *finances conversation*. We chatted a bit about our day, but with both of us suddenly unemployed, the discussion naturally shifted to how we were going to survive.

"So, we can't collect unemployment in Maine because we were both fired for misconduct," Mary began. "Which means I've got to cut expenses." She hesitated, then laid out her plan — including the part where she'd have to move out of her apartment.

"I'm going to head to Machias," she said. "My folks have a cottage there. It's empty, so I won't have to pay rent while I figure out my next steps."

My heart skipped. I didn't want to lose her.

I'd known she might pull up stakes and head Down East. She'd even joked about me joining her — complete with the McDonald's job suggestion. I wasn't exactly eager to don a paper hat, so I countered with a different idea. She had, after all, teased the possibility of us living in the same place.

"How about you stay here in Bangor for a while?" I offered. "Use my spare bedroom. Put your extra stuff in the basement. And we can keep working on the protest movement together."

That was exactly what she'd been waiting for.

"If it's not too much trouble," she said, suddenly shy. She'd clearly been hoping I'd make the offer.

"That's settled then," I thought. She'd stay. I wouldn't lose her. "No trouble at all," I said. "Let's move you in tomorrow. Deal?"

"Deal."

"Wow, you didn't take much convincing," I smirked.

"I knew you were going to offer," she said. "So. there wasn't much to discuss, was there?"

"No, I guess not." We knew each other well enough to anticipate each other's moves. If we lived together for a while, we might even start finishing each other's sentences.

*

With the living situation sorted, we turned to the bigger question.

"So... how are we going to support ourselves?" Mary asked.

"I've got plenty of savings," I said. "And friends who'll keep an eye out for job openings. Plus, I've got a standing offer at Stamford — an old college buddy's been holding a slot for me. I can always move out there."

"California," she mused. "That might be nice."

"But for now, we've got the rest of spring and all summer to focus on the protest movement. If we gain some notoriety, I suspect job offers will come from colleges willing to take a stand — and willing to hire people like us."

"Well," Mary said, "I've got about ten thousand saved. I'd budgeted three thousand for my Canada trip this summer. I won't be taking that now."

"Ten thousand should last you through the year unless something unexpected happens. I own this place, so rent's not an issue. I already pay the utilities. And we can split groceries — which we basically do anyway, considering how often we eat together. Having you here won't be a problem."

Hopefully, I thought.

*

We had a simple dinner — grilled cheese and salad — and Mary headed home around nine.

We knew each other well. We'd disagree about movies and TV shows. She'd clutter the spare bedroom. But with two bathrooms, we wouldn't be elbowing each other while putting on makeup. And with her living here, the house wouldn't feel so empty.

We'd have company, conversation, and purpose. This arrangement was going to work out beautifully — I could just feel it.

Chapter 70: The Third Button

Olivia and I ventured over to *Pat's Pizza* in Orono at the preordained meeting time of four o'clock on a Saturday. Alex had said, "*Saturday afternoon — four o'clock. Bring your lecture. Be there*!" Only he had not said where "there" is. Olivia was confident it was Pat's, "No need to call Alex to confirm."

I had dressed for an afternoon at a typical American pizza joint. I wore tight-fitting blue jeans, a gingham blue-checkered blouse, and a pair of used cowboy boots that I had purchased from a booth at the *Antique Marketplace* on Main Street in Bangor.

When Olivia saw my outfit, she said: "He-haw!" Maybe I was a *little* cowgirlish.

I almost changed out of that gingham shirt. Did you ever buy a blouse with buttons not quite in the proper position for your cleavage? If I buttoned the second button from the top, I looked like a nerd. Just give me an ink pocket protector and send me to MIT, where I'd fit in perfectly. On the other hand, buttoning the third button down showed a bit of cleavage. I liked the shirt, it was a good look, so I wasn't about to change to something else. What's a girl to do? So, I buttoned the blouse at the third button.

*

We got to Pat's first.

"He likes to sit at the bar," Olivia said as we spied three seats together that were unoccupied. "You sit in that one," Olivia instructed me, as we left the middle one empty. That would protect the seat in the middle until Alex showed up, and it would place him in the middle, between the two of us, quite convenient for conversation with both of us.

Alex arrived at four o'clock on the dot. The hostess offered him a table, but he declined as he spied us, waved, and sauntered up to the bar. "Hello strangers!" he greeted us. "How's unemployment treating you?" he grinned.

"Bastard," Olivia nodded, smiled, and acknowledged Alex's greeting.

"And good afternoon to you, too, Assistant Professor Shelley," Alex smiled and nodded his head at me.

"And to you, too, Mr. Newsreporter," I countered, and smiled back. Despite our brief meeting during the interview, I already felt comfortable with Alex. Perhaps it was because he was a good friend of Olivia's, and after hearing of Olivia's previous adventures with Alex over the past few years, I felt I already knew him.

We had already ordered drinks by the time Alex arrived. He glanced at Olivia's beer, then at my wine, and asked, "How is the wine here?"

"My Chardonnay is fine," I told him. He ordered beer, anyway.

"So, I've got to tell you," He said, as he pulled his seat back from the bar so he could more easily talk to us both, "Your interview was very well received, especially after I had mentioned that your plan to protest had cost you your jobs at the College of Maine. I made it seem like you two are committed to driving change in the government's DEI policy, and that you, Olivia, were a victim of a government policy that denied your civil rights. I mentioned that you were trans because I knew you wouldn't mind, and besides, I think you're proud of that. Being transgender added considerable credibility to the story and garnered a substantial amount of viewer attention. That, plus losing your *job* –"

Alex corrected himself as he looked in my direction, "Losing your *jobs*," he continued, "Elicited some viewer sympathy for your cause. I get all of this feedback from the comments, and our viewers loved you guys."

"That's great to hear, Alex. Our action did not go unnoticed! And, no, I don't mind your observation that I'm trans. It's no secret, and I am, indeed, proud of who I am," Olivia reinforced Alex's decision.

"Good," was Alex's reply. "So, in future shoots we'll play up the trans background."

"Future shoots," I asked.

"Oh, yes, of course. I'd like to discuss with you ladies building future stories around your protest quest. I can envision

conducting a series of interviews with you both on your protest progress and on interpreting what is happening in Washington, D.C., and how that relates to past attempts to achieve the same goals. And Olivia," Alex directed his attention away from me to Olivia. "I would love to use you for commentary on how Washington is breaking our constitutional laws."

Alex then turned his attention to me. "And now to you, Ms. Shelley," Alex paused, as if he were trying to decide what to tell me first, "First, I want to learn more about your presidents presentation. And suppose it is what I think it is. In that case, I may be able to leverage it into a new story to educate our listeners on how past presidential behaviors mimic today's presidential actions. I'm very interested in hearing what you have to say." And he said that in earnest, he was serious.

"Second, I want you to do a series with me. I would like to explore your thoughts on women's historical issues – the progress that has been made, as well as the steps backward that have been taken. Our female viewers would eat that up."

*

"Speaking of 'eating that up,' I'm famished," I told Alex and Olivia. "Let's order some appetizers."

We all looked at our menus. Olivia announced, "Does anybody want some spicy food? How about some Jalapeño Poppers?"

Alex and I rejected Olivia's suggestion. "You're on your own with those, Professor," Alex told Olivia. He and I continued scanning the appetizers. Fried Pickles, three flavors of breadsticks — plain, cheese, or pepperoni, spicy waffle fries, and onion rings.

I had my eyes on the onion rings and the fried pickles. "I haven't had onion rings in forever," I decided in favor of those.

"And I haven't had fried pickles in forever," Alex announced.

"Those were my second choice," I told the reporter.

"And onion rings were my second choice," Alex smiled. "How about we share our orders?"

"Perfect," I replied, and noticed Olivia staring quizzically at me. Had I done something wrong?

*

This is hard for me to admit, but at this point, Alex had my attention. He intrigued me. I was thinking: *He's handsome, personable, entertaining – a bit of a showman – and we have American History in common. I think the three of us might have some more very informative discussions if we were to get together more often.*

I was "interested" in Alex. I hadn't felt that way about anyone for years...

Chapter 71: A Date?

We had little time to delve into my presidential comparison lecture when Alex, Olivia, and I had gotten together at Pat's Pizza. I pulled out my notes and gave Alex a quick overview of my class discussion. I could have gone into much more depth, but that would have taken hours. So, instead, I gave Alex the printout of my lecture slides and related notes.

"I'd like to delve into this further," Alex said as he perused my notes. And then he asked: "Do you have a place in mind where we could meet and do that?" he asked.

Oh, oh. That sounded like a date invitation. But I would have a third wheel on that "date" should Olivia accompany me. And that was a relief.

I thought for a moment about where our next meeting might be, and remembered that Olivia and Alex love beer. I had heard people raving about the beer at Mason's, a brewery over on the Penobscot River, so I suggested mid-week at Mason's Brewery. Alex seemed to really like that idea.

"*It's a date!*" Alex declared, as he looked at me, and then quickly looked away.

The earth stood still for me after Alex's declaration. Two things had happened on that final exchange. First, he had said, "*It's a date!*" Was that just a figure of speech — or was it really "*a date*?" If it was "a date," was I comfortable with that? I hadn't been on "a date" for about three years. Did he really think it was "a date?" Was I ready for "a date"?

The second thing that happened was a "*furtive glance*." Somehow, that third button on my blouse, my gingham blouse that had been giving me button trouble, had come undone, my bra was pretty exposed, as I'm sure was a good shot of my cleavage. Alex had glanced, then averted his eyes.

Had he liked what he had seen?

*

We settled on the following Wednesday at six for our next get-together. Only Olivia indicated that she had a conflict that day but encouraged us to proceed without her. There went my third wheel. It would be just the two of us. Was I ready for that?

*

Although Olivia had encouraged us to meet at Mason's without her, I noticed that she was pretty quiet after our get-together. It felt to me like she really didn't approve of Alex and me getting together.

She remained quiet on the ride back home. It seemed to me that she was stewing, but I didn't press her.

Had I done something wrong to offend her?

Chapter 72: The Pings

The way I look at dating is as if it were a series of "pings."

The "*first ping*" is physical attraction. I know I found Alex physically attractive; it would be hard not to. Handsome as heck. But I worried that my physical attraction may have shown the other night: I couldn't take my eyes off of him. Was that feeling of physical attraction reciprocal?

The "*second ping*" refers to a social ping — how do we perform in social settings? Are we comfortable in social groups? We sure were when it was Olivia, him, and me. But how about just the two of us? I guess tonight will tell that tale. This ping is all about "communication," and how we relate to each other conversationally. This is the acid test to see if we have the necessary ingredients to progress to a deeper relationship.

The "third ping" is emotional. Is there actually potential for a deeper, more meaningful relationship? Does he make me feel good about myself? Can he share his deeper feelings with me – and I, him? This one, I knew, was the one that was going to give me trouble. I still have the abuse problem to deal with, and Olivia indicated that Alex was still troubled by the horrible accident in which his wife had been killed. I think these are the reasons that neither of us has progressed in our relationships.

If we can get by the "third ping," well, that will be amazing. But the "*fourth ping*" is equally as daunting.

The fourth ping is about commitment. Both Alex and I have had traumatic experiences through our previous commitments. We have both been damaged by them. *Could either of us commit to long-term relationships again?*

Chapter 73: "Old Jim"

I had butterflies in my stomach as I entered Mason's. *Was this a date?* Not really, I had decided. If it were a date, Alex would have offered to pick me up and take me somewhere. I convinced myself that this was more like a business meeting, a briefing, the sharing of intellectual material so that Alex could do his job better.

*

Mason's Brewery is, ironically, in *Brewer*, Maine. The brewery itself is a long, picture-windowed building with a patio that overlooks the Penobscot River. It sits on the East side of the Penobscot overlooking downtown Bangor. In the late Spring, summer, and Fall, I speculated that soaking up the sun on the patio while watching boats sail up and down the river while sipping suds would be quite relaxing. I imagined sitting outside on the deck with the breeze coming off the water. The Penobscot is wide and relatively deep, allowing it to accommodate small to mid-sized cruise ships, typically in the 100-130 passenger range.

The interior features a spacious, well-appointed, lengthy dining room. It was still cold outside, so I suspected that I'd be meeting Alex inside. I anticipated that when I walked through the doorway, I'd have difficulty finding Alex in the large building, but the brewery was not crowded, perhaps because it was mid-week. I spied him immediately. Alex had chosen well. He had found us a private table in the left-hand corner of the room, by the window, so we had a water view — yet were far from the maddening crowd.

Alex stood as I approached — quite the gentleman. He was dressed nicely, wearing woolen pants and a tweed jacket. He looked very "professor-like," a look I was well used to. I did notice, however, that he was dressed *semi-formally*. *Were these his work clothes, or had he explicitly dressed it up for me?*

As I approached, Alex stood and came over to greet me. *Would it be a nod, a handshake, a peck on the cheek, or just a verbal greeting?*

It was a hug! That felt nice. He took my coat, put it over the back of a chair, and invited me to have a seat. He even held my chair for me.

"Hello, Professor," he greeted me, "Marvelous to see you again."

Was he being humorous, formal, or was it really "marvelous" to see me again?

"And you too, Alex," I said, but tested the humor waters with: "Oh, it's been so, so long."

"For you, too?" he answered.

He was driving me crazy. Was this a date? Was he interested in me? Did he think about me like I'd been thinking about him?

"Absolutely," I responded. My tone was non-committal, so he didn't know if I meant that or not.

*

With the pleasantries out of the way, Alex took the lead by asking how my job search was going. Now that was something I didn't want to talk about — no prospects yet.

"Okay, so far." *How's that for a vague response?*

"And you, what did you work on today?" I asked, switching the subject.

"Well, today was kind of interesting. I did a story on a veteran with PTSD; I spoke with my counterparts in Washington about what's going on with the Federal Funds holdup." He paused.

I smiled and nodded. *He's creative, always thinking. He's sharp and witty.* This felt different to me. The men I had been dealing with over the past several years were professors, some self-assured, most self-impressed, others boring, and still others stodgy. Alex, with his sense of humor and self-confidence, was a breath of fresh air.

*

Alex switched the topic again. "So did you bring your lecture with you?" he asked, seeming genuinely interested.

"I did," I said, "I've printed a new series of slides, and I can walk you through it if you like."

"I would like, but I have to warn you, I'm hoping that you don't pick on James Monroe, our fifth president. Otherwise, you're likely to insult me."

What is he talking about? Our fifth president? Huh?

"Well, you have to understand that I'm a bit of an amateur history buff, myself. In fact, my family can trace its ancestry back to James Monroe, the fifth president of the United States. So, your presentation had better not pick on old 'Jim.'"

"Old Jim?" No one ever called James Monroe "Old Jim." He was funnin' me. But still, an amateur historian, how cool is that, I thought. We have an interest in history in common.

A waitress came to our table, provided us with menus, and took my drink order. We each checked out the menu, made our selections of typical American dishes, and then moved on to discussing my lecture. I was delighted, Alex was actually genuinely interested.

"One other point on this 'Monroe' thing," Alex added as he added more levity to the conversation, "No, I'm not related to Marilyn. That was her stage name, anyway. Her real name was Norma Jeane Mortenson — not Marilyn Monroe."

I suspected that he had used that line before, but I still found it hilarious.

Chapter 74: The Tarriff Discussion

"I don't cover James Monroe in this presentation. But I think you should know that I do 'Old Jim' a disservice in my lecture on tariffs."

"You rat," Alex responded. "What do you say?"

"I tell my students about how James Monroe had inherited Jefferson's *Tariff of 1816*, and how that tariff screwed-up the Southern economy. The point of that tariff was to bring manufacturing to America from Britain, because we could make goods cheaper here and there were no transportation or tariff duties due on domestically-manufactured products."

"So how did 'Old Jimmy,' screw it up?" Alex asked, and I laughed.

"Old Jimmy?" My history professors would have had a cow over Alex's descriptors of his long-lost relative.

I shared what I knew about the tariff situation after Jefferson originally passed that tariff. "*The Tariff of 1816*, enacted during James Monroe's presidency, was designed to protect American industries from British competition after the War of 1812. It imposed duties on imported goods, particularly textiles and manufactured items, to encourage domestic production."

"So that's good, right? Isn't that what we're trying to do with our new tariffs?"

"Not good," was my assessment. "While tariffs helped boost American manufacturing, they also raised prices for consumers. The South experienced significant price increases, and its main market, Great Britain, was being targeted by American tariffs, resulting in a decline in trade for the South. The North was the big benefactor with a big increase in manufacturing jobs."

"Fascinating," Alex declared. "I've never heard anything about 'Old Jimmy's' punitive tariffs before." Alex paused, considering a new idea. "I wonder if we can put together some sort of history show that contrasts today's administration with past administrations. I could be the host, and you could be the talking

head. We could get weekly guests to add to the discussion — and we could orient it to push your protest agenda."

That was a hell of an offer. And if we could do that, it would get me the exposure I needed to find a new job.

"Let's do that," I immediately jumped on the idea. "I'll propose a bunch of topics, and you host the show and get the guests. We can make a go of this – I know we can. It would be beneficial for your station and provide me with exposure. It sounds like a great idea."

It sounded like an excellent idea for two reasons. Number one, he wanted to work with me on intellectual pursuits. And, number two, I'd get to see him regularly...

*

For the rest of the dinner, "DATE," I walked Alex through my PowerPoint slides. He asked great questions, and he even showed me that he knew a thing or two about American History. I was impressed.

Alex picked up the check. Now, officially, it was a "*date*."

"I won't have destitute people paying for my dinner," he teased, as he asked for the check. He was referring to my current state of unemployment. But I'm not destitute. At least not yet...

Chapter 75: Now What?

As we stood to leave, I asked myself: *Now what? How is this supposed to end? Does he walk me to my car and try to kiss me?*

Thank God, nothing of the sort. When we finished dinner and drinks, Alex stood and held my coat for me to slide into. He then looked at me and placed both of his hands on my shoulders.

I was thinking "*hug?*"

But, instead, he looked me in the eyes and said, in all sincerity: "I really, really enjoyed tonight. I can't wait until we do this again."

I almost melted right there on the spot. But instead, I coyly told him how much I had enjoyed the evening. As I made my exit, Alex stayed behind to pay the waitress. Thank goodness there was no kiss-at-the-car scenario...

*

As I left, I considered what had happened tonight.

First, going on a "date" was a huge step for me. I had resisted for so long – it was a nice feeling to have someone interested in me again.

Second, Alex was a complete gentleman. He performed well in a social setting – meaning I think we had made it to the second "ping." That bodes well for future meet-ups.

Third, I think he liked me. Really liked me. I think he likes my physical appearance, and he likes that I'm smart. We are definitely attracted to each other.

But in the back of my mind, I was heeding Olivia's words: Alex uses work as a means to quell relationships. He denies his women attention, using work as an excuse. And then they break up. I'll have to watch out for that.

*

Before our evening at Mason's ended, Alex and I exchanged contact information, ostensibly to stay in touch for the new program we were organizing. But was that the real reason we had traded phone numbers and email addresses?

Chapter 76: The Other Side of the Coin

My date with Mary had gone exceptionally well, at least I thought so. She is pleasant, congenial, articulate, and most of all: bright. I don't suffer dummies, and Mary is far from that. She's an assistant professor of History, after all. Her extensive knowledge of American History was truly impressive; she taught me a thing or two during her presentation – even about Old Jim, my presidential antecedent — stuff I didn't know. And I thought *I* was knowledgeable on that topic.

And then there's that face, those eyes — and that body! Slim. Black hair. Fair-skinned. Green eyes. And those cute little dimples. Her voice is kind of low and sexy; she sounds a little sultry at times, like Lauren Bacall in those old black-and-white Bacall/Bogart movies. I like "sultry." I like it a lot.

And wow — what a package — she's gorgeous; she's built like a "brick house." I wonder what she looks like ...

*

I continued to muse about Mary. There's no two ways about it: we hit it off. We hit it off very well. She's easy to talk with — she's got a laid-back, easy-going personality. She's the kind of girl that you could hang out with, watching movies and TV, chatting, and having a good time.

But, does she party? Does she fully relax and let loose? Or is she always "guarded?" She seemed a little uptight at times at dinner. Does she ever have more than a single glass of wine? And does she like sports? And does she like buffalo wings?

All in all, we have a basis for going forward. I mean that on both a personal and a business level. I'm eager to review her proposal for future shows that we can collaborate on. And another thing – audiences love watching beautiful, articulate women. She'd be perfect for our ratings.

*

I then recalled what Olivia had told me about her abuse situation. I'd have to watch out for that.

Chapter 77: The "President's Birthday" Protests

Mary and I were expecting to attend a protest in Washington, D.C. on June 14th, but a decision by the "*No Kings*" committee not to protest in D.C. during POTUS's birthday/military march was made in May. A sage decision given that POTUS threatened protesters with a pledge to deal with us in a heavy-handed manner should protests occur. They will be "*met with very big force.*"

He actually said: "*If any protesters want to come out, they will be met with very big force... This is people that hate our country. They will be met with heavy force.*"

First, we don't hate our country – we hate what he's doing to it. Second, so now we have a President threatening people who are exercising their right to protest peacefully. This individual, with his total disregard for the Constitution, is exasperating.

*

I wonder if the POTUS threat to greet U.S. citizens with heavy force was responsible for the abysmal turnout for his birthday celebration. Perhaps he scared his own supporters as well. The sparse crowd that attended his vainglorious event was estimated to be between 10,000 and 20,000 people.

On the other hand, conservative estimates for "*No Kings*" protesters on June 14th indicated that five million people who "hate our country" participated in anti-POTUS rallies. Events and protests occurred in nearly 1,800 cities across all 50 U.S. states and territories. In New York City, an estimated 200,000 protesters gathered. Philadelphia had more than 100,000 protestors. Los Angeles had approximately 200,000 protestors. Chicago had an estimated 75,000 protestors.

With these data points in mind, I said to Mary: "If you take the five million 'country haters,' and compare that to the ten-to-twenty-thousand people that media outlets and social media commentators estimated attended the POTUS birthday party, you've got a ratio of 5,000,000 to 20,000. That's," I stopped to do a quick calculation, "a ratio of 250:1."

"That is surely disturbing," Mary agreed. "That means that for every one person who 'loves' our country, there are two hundred

and fifty that don't. That's an astounding amount of 'country hate,'" Mary sarcastically replied.

*

We journeyed to Portland, Maine, to join the No Kings protest on June 14th. Estimates were that 50,000 people, according to Portland Mayor Keith Wilson, had attended this event. That's more than double the size of the paltry crowd that viewed the President's $45 million self-aggrandizing military march.

We protested at Lincoln Park in downtown Portland. It was a peaceful protest, and I'd describe the general tenor of the event as celebratory. People were glad to be out with like-minded citizens who don't want our country to be run by a king. The turnout was so big that the city temporarily closed Congress, Pearl, and Federal streets. These are the main thoroughfares that serve the city. Our event was comparatively "gloriously successful."

Chapter 78: The Madness of King George

When Mary and I made it back to Bangor, we each went our own separate ways. I returned to my home and searched my DVD collection for a political movie. And there it was; the perfect movie to cap my protest day!

*

I selected a mid-1990s movie that dealt with a king who suffered from mental problems. I know, ironic, eh...

The title of the movie is "*The Madness of King George*," starring Nigel Hawthorne and Helen Mirren. It won an Academy Award for "*Best Art Direction/Set Decoration*," and Hawthorne was nominated for "*Best Actor in a Leading Role*," while Mirrin was nominated as "*Best Supporting Actress*."

The movie is based on a real-life event that occurred when King George III of Great Britain began exhibiting erratic behavior. The King was known to speak incessantly and incoherently, sometimes for hours at a time. He often repeated himself, sometimes in complex or florid language. He experienced hallucinations and delusions. Draw your own conclusions...

The movie is about the difficulties that arise when a monarch develops mental health problems. One critic described the movie as "an exploration of the fragility of authority that occurs when a king's mental health falters." In the movie, King George's madness creates a political crisis. What do you do when a country's monarch is clearly "mad?"

As I watched the movie, I thought about some of the articles that I had recently seen on POTUS's mental health. A Harvard Medical School medical doctor recently publicly claimed there is "overwhelming" evidence that POTUS is showing signs of dementia, citing confusion, disorganized speech, and erratic behavior.

I also remembered reading about a group comprised of mental health professionals called *Duty to Warn*, which argues that POTUS poses a danger to our country due to what they describe as psychological instability. The group also described POTUS as

suffering from "dangerous mental illness," and also concluded that he is "paranoid and delusional".

As I continued to watch the movie, I thought about POTUS's bizarre "*Truth Social*" posts and incoherent public statements. For instance, he claims that magnets don't work underwater, which is scientifically incorrect. And this from an individual who constantly boasts about his intelligence.

Or another favorite, this one about a shark circling a sinking boat: "If the boat is sinking, water goes over the battery, the boat is sinking, do I stay on top of the boat and get electrocuted? Or do I jump over by the shark and not get electrocuted?" He acted as if this was a question that "nobody's ever asked before," and credited his "relationship to MIT" for prompting his scientific muse. Crazy stuff like that.

As the movie drew to a close, the director revealed that King George III likely suffered from a disease known as "porphyria," which was described as "periodic, unpredictable and hereditary." I wonder if...

In the end, King George III eventually recovers, at least temporarily, through a combination of treatments including disciplined actions, routine, and humane care. I found myself hoping for a happy ending in our current "madness" situation.

Chapter 79: Can I Get a Vaccination?

It is my feeling that my politicians, the people who are supposed to represent me in Washington, are not doing much to help my LGBTQ+ community. Instead, we're being left to the wolves. Could that be because we represent such a small percentage of voters that we're not worthy of protection? Polls show that 5.5% of U.S. adults identify as LGBTQ+. That's about 13.9 million people — just a drop in the bucket for my vote-hungry politicians. Some estimates range up to 7.2%, but that's still a drop in the bucket for most politicians.

Could it be that homophobia, queerphobia, transphobia, and all of the other LGBTQ+ phobias are inhibiting our politicians from protecting us? Are they afraid that our "disease" might affect them? I'd like to know our current United States Secretary of Health and Human Services' thoughts on this matter... Is LGBTQ+ an infectious disease? If so, can you get shots for it? Oh, I forgot, vaccinations are apparently dangerous...

Not only are we being rendered defenseless through *Executive Orders*, but the current administration sees it as their job description to intimidate states that receive federal funding. And schools that receive federal funding. And they pursue that job with great gusto. MY civil rights are being targeted under this run-amok administration, and they're making it difficult for my state to protect me.

*

Hatred, no matter how sanitized or legislated, is not policy. It's cowardice. And this means that those politicians who have voted hatred into legislation are lily-livered cowards — shame on all of you.

Chapter 80: Moving Forward

How do we move forward from here?

How do we conquer the hatred that is driving MAGA voters and the current administration?

I didn't know it then, but those questions would follow me like a shadow for years.

*

Mary and I decided to move beyond public protest. We wanted an audience — a broad audience. We wanted to reach more students, and a broader sector of the public. So, together, we conceived a reality-TV like show that raised important questions regarding the behavior of the current administration. And our show was very well received. We were having an impact.

*

Mary and I take solace in knowing that, eventually, POTUS will pass, either through physical means or via impeachment.

His Executive Orders will pass.

This storm of lawsuits and headlines he has engaged in will pass.

But what will remain — what always remains — is the truth that we are living together:

> *Every person, no matter their body or their name, their voice or their gender, their skin or their ancestry, belongs in our society.*

Hatred is fleeting. The haters will lose this battle.

Human dignity will endure.